





PÈRE ÉTIENNE PERNET, FOUNDER OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF
THE ASSUMPTION.

LIFE OF PÈRE ÉTIENNE PERNET

*Founder of the Congregation of the
Little Sisters of the Assumption*

Taken from the French by
ALICE LADY LOVAT

PREFACE BY THE REV. HERBERT VAUGHAN, D.D.

Adveniat regnum tuum

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PREFACE

IT is significant that when our Lord described the General Judgement, and gave the actual words he will address to the just and unjust, he makes the fulfilment or neglect of the corporal works of mercy the reason of his reward or punishment. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: I was in prison, and you came to me." The just ask, When? The King answers, When you did it "to one of these my least brethren you did it to me." And when the King utters those awful words to the lost, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels," he will tell the damned that the cause of their eternal misery has been the neglect of their poor and helpless brethren.

Père Étienne Pernet was born in 1825 and found his chief field of labour in Paris, a time and place in which the poor presented a sorry plight. Personal charity was the only source of relief to which they could look, and personal charity had grown cold. People in this country at the present day find some relief of conscience from this kind of Christian work on the grounds of the existence and multiplication of various organisations which abound for the alleviation of the needs of the poor. Rates are gathered by civil authorities for local needs.

Governments give doles to meet depressions. Trade unions come to the rescue in times of crisis. Friendly societies move nearly everywhere. All this is true, but unfortunate—unfortunate because the first and finest element in Christian charity is personal service for the sake of Christ; and in all this modern machinery to relieve the needy, personal service is reduced to a deplorable minimum and the real motive scarcely exists. Officialism with all its detestable interferences and publicities is rampant, and the poor have a proper hatred of the system. It leads to tyranny on the one side and servility on the other. There is only one way in which the weaknesses and insufficiencies of any system can be met properly. By properly I mean, without any fear of supercilious superiority and autocratic intrusion by those who minister, and without any degradation and humiliation for those who are served. That way is the Catholic law of charity which regards every creature as a child of God, and the most impoverished as the object of his special love and care. The motive means all the difference, and the motive of the man and woman who vow their lives to the relief of the distressed is simply the doctrine of the Second Commandment—the love of neighbour as one's self for God's sake. God cannot be omitted without disaster, and the failure of our modern appliances to remedy the evil is the inevitable result of that omission. Without God it is impossible to give creatures, most of all the weakest among them, the full consideration they need and deserve.

This life of Père Étienne Pernet is a perfect example of the fulfilment of this law in the consecrated life of a religious order. It ought to stimulate vocations.

Readers will be moved by many of the episodes narrated in this story of human sympathy and divine love. And there will surely be some who will hear in its powerful appeal the call of Christ to leave all things and follow him in the highest form of service to the poor.

Then there will be others whose place in the world God has already fixed, but whose ways and means offer them plenty of chances to devote themselves to this glorious life in the adoption of individual cases beyond the reach of these ministering angels of the Assumption.

By the publication of this portrayal of a magnificent soul, and of its struggle and success in the dark and unforgotten, but precious and meritorious, corner of the Kingdom, Sister Juliana has given a powerful and concrete reminder to all of the need to remember the essential importance of these Christian duties, and a profound and encouraging consolation to those who do not forget them.

HERBERT VAUGHAN.

FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked by the Reverend Mother of the English branch of the Little Sisters of the Assumption to write a few introductory words to the Life of their holy founder. I think I cannot do better than take as a text the following words addressed by Père Pernet to his daughters:

“We shall get to Heaven only if we have worked to make a heaven on earth.”

Père Pernet belonged by birth to the working class, and, looking at it with unbiassed eyes, supernaturally enlightened, he sounded to the depths what he called “*le mal de l'ouvrier*.” These woes, these “ills,” have presented a problem to the philanthropist since the world began, but, undeterred by the failure of his predecessors, he set to work to find a solution of it in a way which was unquestionably all his own. That he realised that it would be derided by the worldly-wise is clear from the words he used to her on whom he depended for carrying out his views: “We shall pass for fools in the sight of men, and for people who are out of their senses. We shall be persecuted and despised from within and from without. We shall have the crushing trials of poverty, for we shall possess nothing and gain nothing.”

To claim for Père Pernet that he is the first man who has tried to grapple with the great difficulty of raising the status of the poor man and providing for his wants

would be futile. In no time more than in ours has there been a greater number of men and women who have devoted their lives to this task.

Of Père Pernet's solution of the problem it may be said that it was a wholly supernatural one. His work and schemes for the well-being of men were drawn from the study of the Gospels and based on the words and example of Christ. To the devout Catholic there is nothing new in them; nor should his conclusions be disputed by any intelligent believer who has studied the ways of God with man.

The words spoken to St Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogo*, which purports to be a direct communication from the Almighty, and which was defined by Pope Pius, in his Bull of Canonisation of St Catherine of Siena, as being "Doctrina ejus infusa, non acquisita," put the matter in the plainest terms:

"Directly she [the soul] loves me she loves her neighbour; without this her love would not be genuine, for the love of me and of her neighbour make but one. The more a soul loves me the more she loves her neighbour, because the love she has for him proceeds from my love. That is the means I have given you of exercising and cultivating virtue. Your virtue does not profit me, but it should profit your neighbour.

"My gifts are temporal or spiritual. I call temporal gifts all those which are concerned with what is necessary for the life of man, and such things I dispense with great inequality. I do not give all to each one in order that their reciprocal wants may be occasions of virtue, and a means of exercising charity. It would have been very easy for me to give to each one what was useful for his body and his soul; but I willed that all men

should depend one upon another, so that they may thus become the ministers and dispensers of the gifts they have received from me. Whether man wills it or not, he is forced to exercise charity towards his neighbour: if this charity, however, is not exercised through love for me, it is worthless in the order of grace.”¹

The late Fr. Gallwey, S.J., was accustomed to say that there were three kinds of alms—copper, silver, and golden. The first were the alms of the rich, who, though giving largely, do so at a minimum cost of privation. The second were the alms of the moderately well-off, who gave at the sacrifice of luxuries and pleasures. The third, and golden alms, were those of the poor widow whom our Lord praised, saying that her alms were worth more than all the rest because “she of her want” had given all her living.

Let us not presume to undervalue the copper alms, remembering that Christ, having inveighed against the duplicity and vices of the Pharisees, uttered these memorable words: “Give alms, and behold all things are clean to you.”

Of the silver alms it may be confidently predicted that they will gain a reward exceeding great for their donors: one “heaped up and poured into their bosoms,” in proportion to the sacrifices they have entailed. But of the golden alms what can be said except that it is to the sacrifices made by the poor for God’s Church, and for those yet poorer than themselves, united to the great Sacrifice daily offered upon our altars, that it is due that a fate similar to that of the “cities of the plain” does not befall an unbelieving and luxury-loving

¹ *Dialogo*, Chapter VII.

world? For can we doubt that the words of the Prophet still hold good: "Behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom thy sister: pride, fulness of bread and abundance, and the idleness of her and her daughters, and that they did not put forth their hand to the needy and the poor" (Ezech. xvi 49)?

Our great national poet says of "the quality of mercy" that it is twice blessed. But of almsgiving it may be said that it is thrice blessed. It brings blessings on the giver and on the recipient, and God's abundant blessings on both; and heavenly fruits such as are out of the power of the devices of man, of legislative experiments, or the spoliation of the rich to produce or effect.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption are constant witnesses of these supernatural fruits and divine graces; for they carry out the work of their holy Father, Père Pernet, in the same spirit as that in which it was founded. And no words can be found to describe that spirit better than those which he himself impressed upon them: "First of all God, then our neighbour, and if anything is left, ourselves."

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LIFE OF PÈRE ÉTIENNE PERNET

CHAPTER I

Life is in His good will: in the evening weeping shall have place,
and in the morning gladness.—*Ps.* xxix 6.

CLAUDE ÉTIENNE PERNET was born on July 23, 1824, at Velleuxon in the Department of Haute-Saone. He was the son of Claude Louis Pernet and his wife, Madeleine Cordelet, and the eldest of their children. He was baptised the day after his birth. The house where he was born and which belonged to his parents no longer exists. His father was an honest workman, earning his livelihood by the sweat of his brow, and his mother followed the profession of midwife. Little is known with regard to the father except that he died on July 1, 1838, at the age of thirty-nine.

One anecdote, recorded sixty years later by Father Pernet, throws light on his father's character and his own early training.

"One day," he related, "I and some of my companions plundered a neighbouring orchard. My father having discovered what had happened from the state of my pockets, which were filled with the booty, and drawn a confession of guilt from me, took me by the hand and led me to the owner of the orchard. I can see now the sad and severe air which he wore as he said: 'My son is a thief. I bring him to you that you may give him to the police or do whatever else you please with

him. I no longer look upon him as my son.' He then turned as if he was going to leave and abandon me to my fate. I still feel the impression these words made on me; the police, imprisonment even, was nothing to me compared with the thought of my father renouncing me, and no longer looking upon me as his son. I knew how good he was, but I knew his firmness, and I perceived that he was not joking. In short, I was in an agony until I had obtained his forgiveness. Our neighbour, touched no doubt by my father's behaviour, himself interceded for me, and my father was persuaded to reconsider his verdict; but the lesson was a good one, and I never forgot it."

The parish priest of Velleuxon, Père Rollin, speaking of Père Pernet's mother, said: "She was better known than his father on account of her profession, and she had the reputation of being a woman of high character, worthy of all respect, and above all an excellent Christian. The report in the parish concerning her and her husband was that they were eminently respectable and greatly esteemed."

Mme. Pernet's daughter gave her testimony to the same effect. She writes: "I may say that our mother was a good and pious Christian. She was charitable, and unsparing in her devotion to the sick whom she attended, giving her services freely to the poor who could make her no return for them, so that she was known in those parts by the name of 'Madeleine the saint.'" Père Pernet himself, when on one occasion he was asked to describe his mother, said: "She was wise and discreet; a giver of good advice, and her influence was so powerful for good that wherever she went her presence made for peace."

On another occasion he said: "My mother had much faith; she spoke little and never had a bad word to say of anyone, and she loved to do anyone a kind service." His affection for her was unbounded. He loved her so tenderly that, as he told a friend, he was never tired of telling her of it; also, that sometimes when she was absent he could not resist the impulse of scribbling a little note to her which he left for her when he went to bed. "And what did you say to her then?" he was asked. "I only told her that I loved her," he answered quite simply. "Then in the morning I looked into her face to see if she had read what I had written, and when I was sure that she had done so I went off to school with a light heart."

Should we not see in these early reminiscences of a loved mother the first glimmerings of the design with which God inspired him many years later? May he not have learnt from her what good can be done by a woman who devoted herself to the task of nursing the poor and suffering in the working class—not only by ministering to their bodily ailments, but by restoring Christian hopes in the hearts of those whose faith had made shipwreck in the struggle to live?

It was to this mother, whose favourite child he was, and to Père Guillaume that Étienne Pernet owed his vocation. Father Rollin wrote many years later: "Père Guillaume when he first came to Velleuxon picked out a few of the boys who showed greater signs of piety and intelligence than the others, and in order to train them he started a sort of preparatory school from whence they passed on to the Petit Séminaire. Étienne Pernet was from the testimony of his cousins and others the most promising of any of these youths. All those who

remember him agree in saying that he had a prepossessing appearance as well as a gentle and amiable character."

The boy's nature, however, broke out at times, and, speaking of the days of his youth, he said: "I was very nervous and impatient and disliked being contradicted." And to prove this view he took of himself he said, "On one occasion when I was living with my Curé I had a fit of obstinacy. Before I had time to get over it he asked me to sing. I sang well in those days. I did not dare to refuse, but I thought I would play him a trick. Ill came of it; for having pitched my voice too high, and my bad temper urging me on, I tried my vocal chords so severely that I felt them give way; so you see temper was the cause of my losing my voice."

It was commonly said in the country that Étienne was brought up by Père Guillaume: that he was always with him. This assiduity in the instruction of his protégé must have begun early, as the good Father, when correcting a novice for a fault in her Latin pronunciation, said to her, "You have not got beyond that, my child? When I was five years old, seated at my Curé's side, I read Latin more correctly than you do."

No greater proof could be given of the child's precocious intelligence nor of the zeal of the parish priest.

"That holy man," his sister testified, "took the place of a father to him, and never wished to part with him. Our poor mother, who was widowed at an early age, was thus deprived of her son, who was fourteen at the time of his father's death, and who was her greatest consolation. How she rejoiced, however, in seeing him so pious, and bent on giving himself to God!"

“At night,” he said on one occasion, “when my brothers and sister were in bed, I sat up with my mother, and used to read the Lives of the Saints to her while she mended our clothes.”

“As long as he was living at home,” to continue to quote his sister’s narrative, “my mother enjoyed real happiness; but it was necessary at last to make up her mind to a separation, in order that he might follow up his studies. This was a great grief to her, as from that time we only saw him during his holidays, and even those he spent partly with Père Guillaume.”

The exact date of his First Communion is unknown, as the parish registers stop at the year 1832, and he made it in 1836 at twelve years of age. It is recorded, however, that whilst seated at Catechism he received a deep and vivid impression that he was called to the priesthood. One day the parish priest, whilst speaking to his little audience of the sacrament of Holy Orders and the beauty of the sacerdotal vocation, said: “Who knows! Perhaps one among you who are present here to-day may become a priest.” Étienne felt at that moment an irresistible impression in the depth of his soul, and he said to himself, “It will be me.” He felt himself electrified—his soul, so to speak, raised up. “It was a sudden light,” he said, “which struck my soul.”

After his elementary studies Étienne, thanks to his good parish priest’s generous interest in him, went on to what in those days went by the name of the Latin School of Membray. This place is situated eight miles to the north-west of Velleuxon on the right bank of the Saone. From Membray he passed to Vesoul, and there he spent two years in the philosophical seminary

of the diocese of Besançon, to which the Department of the Haute-Saone belongs. The young candidate for Holy Orders having then finished his course of philosophy entered the theological seminary at Besançon.

“Whilst he was there,” we learn from one of his confrères, “he sought the society of the elder members of the seminary and was remarked for his fervour and piety. He was noted likewise for his goodness and amiable manners, and though of a retiring nature he became favourably known to all by his modesty and virtue, and the earnestness with which he applied himself to his duties. He was universally loved, and so peaceful was he that no one was ever known to have an angry altercation with him. Moreover, he had the ‘sacred fire’ in him—for when some of the elder students joined the ranks of the volunteers for the Foreign Missions young Pernet was of the number. Hence when this band of youths passed who were predestined to an apostolic life it was commonly said, ‘Those are going to be missionaries.’ He was indeed to be a missionaryer, but one destined to evangelise his own country; to be a missionaryer to workmen, to the poor, to the sick and to the abandoned.

“One fine day,” continues his confrère—“as far as I remember it was at Easter, 1844—he left us, and no cause, as far as we knew, was given for his disappearance. But God had his designs upon him, Providence was leading him.”

Père Pernet admitted in confidence to a friend that so great was his apprehension of the responsibility of the care of souls that he had twice left the seminary. “The first time,” he said, “was when I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I started off on foot without giving

warning to anyone, and tramped all night through the snow, and arrived at home worn out and exhausted. The moment my mother saw me she exclaimed: 'Well, what are you doing here?' I told her about my fears. She did not reproach me, but her eyes filled with tears. That was enough. The following day I returned to Vesoul."

The second occasion was clearly the one to which his fellow-student referred, and of which he could give no explanation, and it happened when Étienne was nineteen years old and about to assume the ecclesiastical garb. Dreading more and more a priest's responsibility and the isolation of the secular clergy, it appeared to him that he would, in becoming a priest, be acting against his conscience. His superiors, however, were unwilling to part with him, and they proposed the alternative to him of entering for a year in a house of studies attached to the Seminary of Besançon as a day boarder. He accepted this offer; but the decision and anxiety of mind which led to it had told on his health. He fell ill and longed for the repose of Vellexon. When he got home he found the door locked and his mother absent, so he sought refuge with the Curé, Père Guillaume, who received him with open arms and nursed him through his illness with fatherly care and devotion.

As soon as he was restored to health he put in a year's study at Besançon, after the conclusion of which he took the post of professor in a college under ecclesiastical direction for another year.

During the two following years he took a position as private tutor, and whilst accompanying his pupil to a course of lectures in a Jesuit college he was given to understand that were he to take steps to get admitted

into their ranks no difficulty would be placed in his way. But he abstained from doing so, as he did not feel called by God to the Society.

In the year 1849 he made up his mind to go to Paris and there take up a definite career. Again his health—never too robust—suffered from the uncertainty of his mind and the anguish it occasioned. He became so ill that for a time his life was in danger, and he received the last Sacraments. On his recovery he made a daily pilgrimage to the Church of our Lady of Victories to obtain from the Blessed Virgin the grace of finding out his vocation.

He used to take a friend with him sometimes on these occasions, and a priest to whom his friend was known enquired of him, "Who is the young ecclesiastic who comes here so often to pray?"

This remark being repeated to Étienne gave him, we are told, matter for reflection.

"I look like, and have the manners of a priest, then?" he said to himself. "No, no, never will I become one!"

Another time when he was visiting the same shrine he offered up this prayer: "Dear Mother, I beg of you to take a special interest in me, and to occupy yourself with the thought of my future. Send me wherever you will, only give me a sign that you grant my petition."

"At the same time," said he, "I formed interiorly the wish to hear the clock strike one the following night as a sign that my prayer had been heard. In those days I was a good sleeper, and I used to spend the whole night without waking. I left the church and thought no more of the bargain I had made with our Lady. When night came I went to bed and slept at once and then awoke just as the clock marked and struck one o'clock.

Without paying particular attention I went off to sleep once more. It was only in the following morning that I recalled the fact to mind that I had heard the clock strike one. The thought was a real consolation to me, and I said to the Blessed Virgin with a grateful heart: 'My good Mother, you do then interest yourself in me!'"

This took place in the month of May, 1849. He made a Novena, and when he had finished it, having announced that he wished to get a place as professor, he was put into communication with the Superior-General of the nuns of the Assumption who were living at that time in the Rue de Chaillot. He called at the convent, but Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus was unable to come to the parlour, so she sent her assistant, Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, to speak to him. Etienne Pernet was so struck by the elevation of mind and the supernatural spirit shown by this religious that he opened his soul to her. Later on he was heard to say that it was to this holy nun that he owed the knowledge of his vocation.

The Mother-General being aware that the head of the college at Nîmes required professors sent M. Pernet to him.

CHAPTER II

God's will is the true life of the soul.—ST FRANCIS DE SALES.

IT was in the year 1849, accordingly, that Étienne Pernet started for Nîmes, and presented himself to Père Emmanuel d'Alzon, the apostle of that town as well as the apostle of the times he lived in during the fifty years in which he stood at the breach defending the rights of the Church.

“Père d’Alzon,” to quote Mgr. Besson’s words, “joining action with speech, zeal with generosity, perseverance with fervour, founded a free college in the days when such colleges were established with the utmost difficulty. He made it the cradle of his Congregation, adopting for the latter the Rule and habit of St Augustine. The foundation of the Augustinians of the Assumption took its origin in the year 1847. The first vows of its earliest members dated from 1850, but their public vows were only pronounced at Midnight Mass on Christmas Day, 1851. Père d’Alzon had a passion for high ideals, and all his undertakings were on an heroic scale.”

It was under the influence of this great servant of God and of his Church that the qualities and virtues of Étienne Pernet were to reach their full development.

From the moment he arrived at the Assumptionist College he devoted himself with all the ardour of his soul to its service. He began by being appointed sub-procurator and monitor; he was later on made prefect of discipline, and then professor of the fifth class. He succeeded in all these different posts in gaining the affection of the students. His great goodness attracted all hearts. We have been told by some of them that they could not resist playing tricks upon him in order to bring out his inexhaustible patience and serenity. Père H. D. Galeran, who was one of these students, when writing to one of his former masters speaks thus of him: “You have not forgotten Étienne Pernet’s arrival at the Nîmes college and his first efforts as prefect in charge of the first division—that of the big boys as it was called. You know how popular he was with us who were students in that class. His attractive personality, the very sound of his voice, which was always so

gentle, his diffidence, then the discovery we made, as we got to know him better, of his kindness of heart: everything about him attracted us to him. We knew him to be timid, but, strange to say, this characteristic seemed to invest him with greater authority in our eyes; it inspired us with the greater respect. We would not have caused him pain on any account. And this on the part of schoolboys was nothing short of miraculous. We even did our best to put him at his ease and to make the exercise of his duties pleasant for him. He was not unconscious of these friendly dispositions, and he sought opportunities to show us tactfully his appreciation of our conduct towards him.

"I can see now his first introduction to us: it was at the morning recreation when we were all seated in our ranks when Père d'Alzon presented him to us. His usual attire was a frock coat of dark brown material and a tall hat. He wore a beard, and he allowed his hair to grow long. He carried a snuff-box, and frequently had recourse to its contents; this habit he gave up later on.

"We used to call him the 'Ghost.' Wherefore? Very shortly after his arrival at the college he suddenly disappeared. 'Where is M. Pernet?' asked the students. 'He is ill, and in the infirmary.' Our curiosity was excited, and one day we stopped the doctor on his way to the infirmary to enquire what was the matter with M. Pernet. The answer was that he was seriously ill with typhoid fever, and that he had been isolated and that nobody was to be allowed to go near him. Two months later he reappeared in the court attached to the gymnasium wrapt in a great cloak. He had all the appearance of a spectre. His face was pale

and drawn, his eyes sunk in his head—he was no longer the same man! ‘It is a ghost,’ cried out Edgar de Balincourt, a boy who was present. He hit on the right word, and it stuck to him among the ‘old boys’ till this day. It was soon noticed that a great friendship struck up between Étienne Pernet and Hippolyte Saugrain. These two men, though of an absolutely different stamp of character, were equally tender and warm-hearted. They were both destined to be a joy and consolation to Père d’Alzon and to confer honour on the Assumptionist Congregation. These two much-loved masters understood each other, and death has not sundered their friendship, which was in God and for God.

“May I be allowed to relate a little anecdote which is not devoid of point? I have said that M. Pernet was of a nervous temperament. On some holiday occasion we had picnicked in a wood in the neighbourhood. The heat was overpowering, and we had drunk the white wine of the country a little too freely with not too much water in it. . . . The result was that we lost our heads, and were all of us in a state of semi-intoxication. We danced, we sang, we cut capers, a menagerie of wild beasts could not have been noisier. The prefect, not without alarm, gave the signal to depart. He was answered by discordant cries, by shouts of dissent; the fun and frolics continued—no attempt was made of falling into rank. I must confess that I, for my part, was as bad as the rest. Poor Étienne Pernet came and seized me by the arm and said, ‘Henry, you too! This is a mutiny, a revolt. You refuse to obey me.’

“‘No, no, sir; we are only amusing ourselves. Come, join us and sing too!’

“But I could not help seeing that he was seriously

annoyed. At once the word was passed round that we were giving pain to M. Pernet. Order was re-established, and the return journey to the college was effected in peace and tranquillity.

“His natural timidity did not prevent him from keeping his eyes open. He studied our characters, humours and passions to the root. He knew how to utter a short word at the right moment which went straight to the spot. He was very quick in observing without giving the impression that he was doing so, and his remarks, which were often exceedingly intelligent, showed that if he ever succeeded in breaking through the shell of timidity and reserve with which nature had enveloped him, he would show himself a man of action, and capable of great deeds without losing the admirable suavity of his disposition.”

M. Pernet also occupied himself very energetically during the year he spent at Nîmes, on his first term of residence there, with a Club and other good works. In this he was seconded by Père Victor Cardenne, to whom the name of the friend of the poor had been given, and who was likewise a professor of the same college.

This Club had been started by Père d’Alzon with the object of bringing the children of poor families together in order to put them in the way of sanctifying the Sunday, also as the means of giving them religious instruction and the first elements of learning. This good work developed rapidly. Adults, soldiers amongst others, joined the children. Many of the elder students of the college attended the Club; at first on Sundays only, later on upon other days in the week—often bringing with them portions from their meals which they or their com-

panions had saved up; amongst these there were some who showed a strong apostolic spirit. A sermon was preached to the frequenters of the Club by one of the collegians after Mass on Sunday. "It was a real sermon," writes one of the former pupils, "seriously preached by students whose habits were very far from being serious. M. Pernet," he added, "spoke only in the morning, or after Vespers, and his sermons were short, as he disliked speaking in public; his instructions, however, were on fire with the love of God."

We may draw the conclusion from a letter written by Père d'Alzon to Étienne Pernet on September 11, 1849, that the latter was still uncertain about his future. Ignorant of his own feelings he was equally so regarding the affection in which he was held by all those who surrounded him. The saintly founder of the Assumptionists wrote to him as follows:

"I can assure you, my dear friend, that you make the greatest mistake in looking upon yourself as a stranger amongst us. All the lay-masters in the house love you, the religious look upon you as a brother, and as for me I can assure you my affection for you is that of a father for a dearly-loved son. Believe me that it is only your extreme modesty which prevents you from seeing the kind sentiments entertained towards you—sentiments which I sincerely hope will go on ever increasing; because if God is the principle, the link and the end of our union, as I am convinced he is, he will only augment this union and sympathy as time goes on."

A few days later Père d'Alzon writes again to him, and alluding to his health, which was still giving cause for anxiety, remarks: "The best thing you have got to do is to nurse yourself; go and spend a little while at Vigan.

The air of the Cevennes will remind you of your own Franche-Comté."

One day in the middle of September, 1849, during the vacation, Père Pernet started off with a pupil who was but a little younger than himself, on a pilgrimage to our Lady of Roche, a shrine which was at about nineteen miles' distance from Nîmes, between that town and Avignon. "At the foot of the holy mountain," his companion, the Abbé Galeran, relates, "M. Pernet began to take off his shoes, meaning to climb the hill bare-foot. He was worn out with fatigue. I was equally exhausted. I should never have had the strength nor energy to climb the stony path bare-foot. Accordingly, putting into force the authority he had given me over him during the pilgrimage, I forbade him all acts of austerity for his own good and mine. No one but M. Pernet and I, and Père d'Alzon who had authorised it, knew the object of this pilgrimage. Its object was to ask God through the intercession of our Lady to obtain for him the grace of a religious vocation for the Order of the Assumption which at that moment Père d'Alzon had in mind to found. It was in the year 1850, a short time after making this pilgrimage, that the important act was signed by which M. Pernet and the three earliest disciples of the founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption promised to receive and adopt the Constitutions of that Congregation as soon as the Holy See should have approved of them. On the following Christmas Day they privately pronounced their vows.

"On his return from his pilgrimage Étienne Pernet set off for Avignon in order to venerate the celebrated ivory crucifix of Jean Guillermin which was at that time

kept in the hospital chapel. It is now in the town museum.

“The face of the crucified Saviour, is remarkable, as is well known, for two expressions, which while in complete harmony remain absolutely distinct: those of resignation and of suffering. This constitutes the great merit of this marvel, that it is a work of genius illuminated by divine faith. Étienne Pernet when gazing on it appeared to be seized by a sudden and profound impression. He remained silent and absorbed in its contemplation. His eyes were fixed on the sacred figure; he appeared to be trying to force his lips to utter a prayer, then falling on his knees, and sobbing, he kissed the feet and watered them with his tears. Unable to contain his emotion he exclaimed: ‘It is indeed he! such as I have seen him in my meditations. It is thus that I have always represented him to myself. My God, how beautiful thou art in this state of suffering which thou didst accept for love of us!’

“You can easily understand how this spontaneous act of faith touched us to the heart. The good Sister who showed us the crucifix shed tears. Turning to me she whispered: ‘This man must be a saint! See how he loves our Lord.’”

CHAPTER III

Les événements sont les sacrements de la volonté de Dieu.

YES, he loved our Lord with a faithful love which dated from his earliest infancy. With what joy accordingly must he have been filled when on Christmas night, 1851, he pronounced his perpetual vows in company with the Fathers Brun and Hippo-

lyte ! all three placing themselves in the hands of Père d'Alzon (who had previously pronounced his vows), and taking the religious habit from him. Père Picard, who was later on to become Superior-General of the Congregation, and to be such a powerful support to Étienne Pernet in his good works, pronounced his first vows on the same day. Père Victor Cardenne's holy death took place on the previous December 11. The surprise of the students was great—almost amounting to stupefaction—when assembling in the chapel they beheld their master completely transformed. M. Pernet's long beard had disappeared, and the frock coat was exchanged for the habit of a religious: the Congregation of the Assumption had sprung into life. Père Pernet was among the elder members of the valiant band over whom Père d'Alzon exercised so deep and lasting an influence. We learn from Père Pernet's sister that his mother was pleased at her son's decision. "But," she said, "our mother could not help regretting that he had not been called to join the ranks of the secular clergy, which would have enabled her, had he been a parish priest, to end her days beside him. All the same this pious and generous soul made no complaint. She had given her son to God, and the gift was without repentance; never did she attempt to turn him away from his purpose."

In 1852 Père Pernet was sent as procurator to the college in the Faubourg St Honoré in Paris, which had just been founded, and which was afterwards moved to Clichy. His mother died on July 10, 1857. No details have been recorded about her death, but it must have been a cause of deep affliction to her son's loving heart.

Trials of all sorts were not wanting to him at Clichy; they sanctified and fortified his soul, which our Lord had chosen, and of which he desired to take entire possession in order to make a vessel of election of him for the extension of his kingdom and the salvation of souls.

Père d'Alzon having urged upon Père Pernet the necessity of preparing for his ordination, the latter in his humility pleaded his unfitness for that sacred office and his apprehensions at assuming it. In return for his letter his superior addressed the following remarks to him, which are very characteristic of Père d'Alzon's affectionate nature, and the gaiety and charm of character of the holy founder:

"Well, if you cannot be a holy priest, if you tend towards perfection you have nothing to fear in spite of your defects. You do not, seemingly, realise the miracles God works even in incapables if they are men of goodwill. It is sheer loss of time alarming yourself on the subject. Rather rejoice. Look upon yourself as a happy beast of burden of whom our Lord intends to make use. Study as much as you like; it will be of great use to you. Give your utmost assistance to Père Brun in keeping up a religious spirit in the college, and more especially so among the priests. If I do not summon you to Nîmes it is only in order that you may work where you are for the good of souls."

Père Pernet, together with Père Hippolyte, received successively in three months the tonsure, minor orders and the sub-diaconate: the first on December 19, 1857; the diaconate in Paris on March 20, 1858; and on Holy Saturday, April 3 of that year, he was ordained priest at Le Mans by Mgr. Nanquette.

It was on April 3, forty-one years later, on Monday in

Easter week, that Père Pernet took his departure for heaven.

He celebrated his first Mass in the college chapel at Clichy the day after his ordination. On April 8, Père d'Alzon wrote in words which one feels came straight from his heart: "So at last you are a priest! May our Lord cause you to grow each day in perfection by pointing out to you fresh virtues for you to acquire in your contact with the Divine Victim. *Imitamini quod tractatis!* That should be your continual lesson. And indeed, my dear friend, the sacrifice you should make is that of your whole life. Pray, pray without ceasing in union with Jesus immolated on the altar. By that means you will obtain all you need.

"I implore of you to use all your influence in developing the religious spirit amongst your brethren. A fear that this spirit may become effaced is always before me. A priest newly ordained should have a large stock of it."

Père d'Alzon writes again on Ascension Day of the same year, in answer to a letter from Père Pernet putting before him some trials he was undergoing, "The account you give me is indeed very sad. You will have to pass through *tribulationes multas et malas*. Well may God be praised! Job suffered a great deal more, and he was a better man than you, if you will pardon my saying so! Then our Lord before he ascended to heaven had a great deal to put up with—*le pauvre bon Dieu*. And if he endured this for our sake why should we not do as he did? . . . Let us throw ourselves in his merciful arms: humiliations, weariness, fights against discouragement, a little illness and bad health on the top of all—that is what is wanted to make saints of all Assump-

tionists. Give yourself wholly to our Saviour, my very dear son; every time you ascend the Altar, make a very poor little victim of yourself, and if you are burnt all the better for you."

A few months later Père Pernet, to the joy of his good friend the Curé, sang High Mass at Velleuxon, and preached on the feast of St Reine, the patron saint of the district.

In October he was recalled to Nîmes to take up the same duties which he had performed on his previous stay there, and in addition to these he was made professor of the fifth class. Other good works, such as visiting the poor families belonging to the benefit societies, continued to hold a place in his life. Besides this he was appointed by Père d'Alzon President of a board of Oriental schools which was attached to the college in 1863.

Before proceeding further it seems only right to quote the information which has reached us concerning these two periods of Père Pernet's residence at the college at Nîmes.

One feature comes out prominently in these reminiscences; which is that Père Pernet showed himself—what in truth he had always been—a saint. M. de Pelerin, who was a student at the college during the first period of Père Pernet's stay at Nîmes, says of him: "Père Pernet was a holy man before being a holy religious, and he was a holy religious after he became a member of the Order of the Assumption." It might have been truly said of all his actions from that time that they bore the mark of sanctity. He loved the Rule and caused it to be observed with rare fidelity by those under him. As early as the year 1849 his devotion to the Rule was

the theme of some serio-comic verses composed by one of the students of the college.

Later on it was a subject of profound edification to the members of his community, especially to the younger ones, to see how faithfully he practised every exercise enjoined by the Rule and continued doing so to the end of his life.

A model of obedience to his superiors and the Rule, he was also a model of sweetness and humility to his brethren. It was on account of the meekness of which doves are a symbol that Père Pernet was so fond of them. He used to keep doves in his cell in the college, and the students interpreted correctly the attraction they had for him.

An allusion is made to this taste in some verses composed by one of them on the feast of St Charlemagne, February 19, 1862, which run as follows:

*Pour le Père Pernet, c'est une autre mesure
Qui vient à mes accents mêler plus de douceur ;
Ainsi que le grand Saint, que chaque créature
Trouvait prêt à l'aimer, à la nommer sa sœur
Il garde en sa cellule un nid de tourterelles
Et charme ses regards par ces oiseaux fidèles
Qui servirent un jour au rachat du Sauveur.
Oh ! puisse-t-il, avant de descendre en la tombe,
Voir plus d'un écolier redevenir colombe !*

It was by means of this gentle influence which Père Pernet exercised over the students and all around him, and with which he imbued the Congregation founded by him, that he was able to reach "the masses," and subdue many souls to the sweet yoke of Christ.

A former pupil speaks in the following manner in a letter to a member of the Assumptionist Order of the

astounding impression of kindness and amiability made upon him by Père Pernet:

“To anyone acquainted with Père Pernet it is impossible to dissociate his name from the idea of goodness and gentleness. What self-command he possessed! No tricks or vexations troubled his serenity. When he had to find fault with anyone, he first hesitated, and then mingled the name of God or our Lady with his rebuke.”

Was this unalterable gentleness the result of temperament and possibly natural to him? Certainly not; it was unquestionably due to virtue acquired by efforts known only to God and himself.

Père Pernet was endowed by nature with great sensitiveness and extreme delicacy of soul. This natural impressionability, though strictly kept in command, revealed itself fairly often to those who observed him closely by the unmistakable expression on his countenance. His humility, of which we shall have occasion to speak elsewhere, and which shone with supreme lustre in his last illness, was a virtue which he gave those about him whilst at the college many opportunities of admiring. Of this virtue Père Pernet said that it was at the very foundation of a Christian education and of good works. In a summing-up of the means to be taken for the training of youths which he made whilst prefect of discipline, he remarked: “It must be impressed upon the scholar that he has to observe the Rule and submit at times to be humbled in his self-love.” We shall see later on the extent to which he clung to this point when it was a question of the “Little Sisters” and their work.

The solidity of his judgement and the supernatural

intelligence which, even at this period, enabled him to reach souls and to attain an extraordinary power and influence over them was the fruit of his intimate union with our Lord, and, at the same time, of his tender devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Again we must refer to the reminiscences of a former pupil whom we have previously quoted : "Père Pernet received Holy Communion nearly every day before becoming a priest. I can see him now returning from the altar rails. He used to kneel down with an expression of profound recollection . . . at those times he seemed almost transfigured as if he was no longer on earth. He seemed ravished in God. . . . The impression that he made upon me was such that even now when I think of what he was, it is a subject of edification to me. It should be remembered," continues this correspondent (who wishes to remain anonymous), "that Père Pernet's time was fully employed; but he used the moments of liberty which the care of the pupils at study, recreation, or whilst taking exercise permitted, in saying the rosary or other prayers."

Piety such as his, nourished on the love of God, necessarily gave birth to zeal and self-sacrifice. The zeal, as we have seen, manifested itself in the college from the first when Père Pernet was given the post of monitor and prefect. This position, with its minute details and constant preoccupation upon all matters which tend to maintain order, to promote work, to develop piety and, in short, to effect all that is required for the formation of the Christian character in children, in itself offers but little attraction. His zeal was wholly supernatural and founded on obedience. Thirty years later, about the year 1897, he happened to be conversing in the

college study-place with one of the religious, and he allowed the following avowal to escape him: "I can never pass this classroom without a shudder recalling all that I suffered in it."

On another occasion, when an effort was being made to draw from him some details of the years he had spent at the Nîmes college during the time which preceded the foundation of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, he sighed, and exclaimed as if the recollection gave him pain: "Nîmes! Nîmes was worth something to my soul! I have done like Jacob—though not by my own concurrence. I have toiled with pain for fourteen years to obtain my Rachel, by which I mean the certitude of what God asked of me."

Fourteen years had in truth to pass before he received the divine inspiration to set on foot the work of which he was the founder.

Previous to this event, and in different circumstances, he wrote the following letter to a prefect, which, besides showing his kindness and sympathetic spirit, throws light on his own memories of his past life:

"So, my dear friend, you have thrown yourself—or been thrown—into the breach; that is, you are in the prefect's chair. I can say by experience that it is a less comfortable seat than the cushioned benches of the Madeleine (I speak of the church of that name). . . . Still, though you are paying dearly for the honour of presiding over a noisy and troublesome crew, yet you are about to undertake a great work for the good of souls, and I ask of God to make your devotion to it and your patience full of fruit. You will not have always to eat the husk of the nut; one day you will taste the kernel, and you will find it all the sweeter on account of the



PÈRE ÉTIENNE PERNET, WHILST CELEBRATING HOLY MASS, RECEIVES
SUPERNATURAL LIGHT ABOUT THE FOUNDATION OF THE LITTLE
SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION.

labour it has cost you to cultivate it and bring it to maturity.”

Meanwhile Père Pernet's health showed no sign of improvement; accordingly Père d'Alzon, in the hope of his deriving benefit from a complete rest, sent him on a visit to a family of the name of Varin d'Ainville, with whom he was well acquainted and who were devoted friends of his Congregation; they lived in the ancient manor-house of Servas, six miles from Alais.

Mlle. C. Varin d'Ainville, describing his visit, says: “His appearance, which was at once dignified and reserved, his piety and his tact conquered first the esteem and then the affection of the parents, their children, and the numerous friends who frequented the manor-house during the holiday time. He left the impression behind him of a humble and discreet zeal, and he already began to show the strong attraction he had to sowing good seed wherever he went. Père Pernet proposed one day to use some part of our leisure hours in the study of the Holy Scriptures. Thus he, and my mother and I, leaving the young people to their games, used to listen to the good Father's commentaries, seated under a shady tree, or whilst pacing to and fro in the grounds. He took his subject usually from the Psalms. I must own that at the time I found this way of spending the recreation rather dull; still I have kept a pleasant recollection of those wanderings in our solitary country places, and I can still recall the appearance of Père Pernet—which was so gentle, and, though so ascetic, never harsh or austere. He was always full of compassion for human weaknesses, and knew how to profit by every event in life to raise the soul to God.

But he did not restrict his zeal to us and our friends. My mother was at the head of an orphanage dedicated to the Nativity, in which children were trained to an agricultural life. There were forty or fifty boys in the orphanage, and it was under the charge of the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul. . . . The good Father used often to go there to give instruction to the children, and visit the works, and above all to encourage the Sisters in the accomplishment of their mission.

“The choir of the parish church was very unsatisfactory; the singing of the Masses for the Dead was especially bad. Père Pernet accordingly undertook the direction of it for my benefit and that of the boys of the orphanage, the result being that since that time we have kept up the tradition of the proper way in which such Masses should be sung till this day.

“We used also to pay visits to people in the neighbourhood, and he never failed to sow good seed on these occasions without seeming to do so. They used to envy us this worthy priest in a neighbouring country-house which was surrounded with Protestants; his very appearance was in itself a sermon.

“The good Father derived much benefit from the time he spent with us, and I must add that my mother used to congratulate herself afterwards on having restored him to health.”

CHAPTER IV

On ne comprend la terre que lorsqu'on a connu le ciel.—Joubert.

PÈRE PERNET was sent again to Paris in 1863 at the end of the scholastic year; on this occasion to the mother-house in the Rue François I^{er} which had just been started, the college at Clichy having been suppressed. Here he was wholly employed in parochial work; he heard numbers of confessions, visited the sick, took them Holy Communion, and assisted them in their last hour with the utmost assiduity.

A friend, who as a youth lived in this neighbourhood, writes as follows: "In consequence of the church of Chaillot being somewhat difficult of access, the chapel of the Fathers of the Assumption became the resource of the people living there. The district was at that time thinly populated, and goats used to feed undisturbed on the commons which surrounded us. Good Père Pernet was accustomed to visit those that were sick nearly every day. He used to arrive at no matter what hour and was always kind, cheerful and communicative. His conversation was to the point, brief and lively. He showed his character in his brisk walk, and I can recall even the way he opened the door: he was not a moment over it! He had the gaiety and temperament of the saints—always looking at things from the favourable point of view and judging events in a supernatural light. In those days he was very thin and delicate in appearance. He had a long face, with black smooth hair and pale complexion, and his eyes seemed to read you through and through. . . . I remember going to confession to him several times; his advice was always concise and

enlightened. He never wasted words, and his views of life and its duties were ever elevated and exhilarating. . . . Certainly his mission was to console and raise the courage of those who had recourse to him."

We have now reached the time when Père Pernet's life began to shape itself, and to turn in the direction of the work to which the last thirty-six years of his life were to be dedicated, and which was to be productive of so much good. It was during the exercise of his ministry that the project, of which he had had the first conception in his visits to the families belonging to the Club at Nîmes, ripened and developed. He gave an explanation of the circumstances which led to it in the following words: "It was at the time when Père d'Alzon had given me charge of the Club where about two hundred children assembled on Sundays that I began to realise what may be termed 'the workman's ills'¹ and the remedies which should be applied to them. I was necessarily brought into close relation with the children's parents, whom I also visited as frequently as possible. I never gave them money, but—I know not why—these poor people confided all their trials and woes to me. The women of the Rey district were especially communicative, and there it was that I came across misery such as I scarcely had any conception of before. There was a great manufacture of carpets in the place in which all hands were engaged. No one had any time to nurse the sick, who accordingly abandoned themselves to despair. In addition there were things which should have been said and done in these houses which no man nor priest could have said and done. I asked myself

¹ *Mal de l'ouvrier.*

what means could be taken? Clearly a woman was required, and a nun. But at that time I did not see my way clearly. I had nothing definite in view. God's hour had not struck."

What he had seen at Nîmes existed in even a more deplorable fashion in Paris, and he then began to realise that, in order to re-establish God's rights in souls where they had been utterly ignored and forgotten, it was necessary to evangelise the workman.

One day, early in 1864, whilst he was saying Mass with the intention of offering himself to God in union with the Divine Victim, and was conjuring him to signify his adorable will on the subject, he received a full and complete light upon it.

In June, 1890, on the occasion of the celebration of the silver jubilee of the Congregation, Père Pernet was asked to furnish some data on which its history up to that time could be based. He reflected for some moments, then, joining his hands together, he dictated the following statement, which was nothing less than a manifestation of that with which God had inspired him with regard to it:

"Our century is a time of self-will, rationalism and materialism; the thought of a life to come is scouted; all sense of the supernatural is destroyed in souls by extinguishing faith in Jesus Christ, Saviour and Redeemer, and in his Church which is persecuted at the same time that it is turned into ridicule. Family life is disorganised. God is banished from the school, the hospital and the charitable asylum, and from our laws and institutions. His existence is denied, or at any rate treated with contempt by those who have charge of governing the people. The rich exploit the poor, the

powerful dominate the feeble and make slaves of them. Everything is crumbling in the society of men because blindness and perfidy rule the world. What can be done to repair these disasters, and to remedy so many evils? It can only be done by restoring the kingdom of God and bringing back the reign of Jesus Christ and his Church. To effect this it is necessary to rehabilitate the family, to regenerate it; to restore faith, worship, marriage and baptism, and the practices of a Christian life to a place of honour in men's lives. The classes—rich and poor—must be brought into communication so that the man of the world may fraternise with the workman and befriend him; likewise that the woman of the world may make common cause with the wife of the workman and their children, giving them the example of piety, devoted service and of a Christian life. The elements of which a nation is composed would thus be brought into combination in the unity of faith, of fraternal charity and submission to God and his Christ. The happy result of such a reformation would be to give a new people to God, restored to the Church and imbibing supernatural vitality from her bosom with the grace necessary to fight the evil one and the spirit of revolt and impiety. . . . Let us suppose for a moment that God should raise up a woman in His Church in the present time, a daughter of the Blessed Virgin; that he were to call her to be his spouse and that he sent her to carry the "good tidings," as he did his apostles of old, and to give an example of devoted service to the poor, the working men and to all who were in trouble and necessity. Let us again suppose that this elect soul, whilst nursing the body humbly and attending to corporal wants, succeeds in re-establishing prayer in the home,

in instructing the ignorant on the necessary truths of salvation; in reconciling sinners with God, in causing those who have never been baptised and are ignorant of the riches contained in the Holy Eucharist, to have recourse to those sacraments, as well as to that of matrimony, so that their unions may be blessed by the Church. Supposing, moreover, that the woman whom God has thus called should associate herself with the woman of the world in order that she might share in the good work; likewise that the man of the world should fall in with these views and give his help so that he too might befriend the working man by his protection and services. Granted all this and you will find all these hopes fulfilled, and the woman chosen by Jesus Christ to be his spouse and called by him to fulfil them, in the person of the Little Sister of the Assumption. And if the Little Sister is as faithful as she should be grateful for the great goodness and the many graces God has shown her, we may well believe that he sees in her an instrument to be used in his interests in these days in which we live: to God be honour and glory for ever and ever."

CHAPTER V

He will guide the mild in judgment: he will teach the meek his ways.—*Ps.* xxiv 9.

THE hour for this fresh departure was at hand. Père Pernet awaited it in prayer, humility and obedience.

One day, in the month of May, two girls belonging to the working class presented themselves at his con-

fessional in the little, humble chapel in the Rue François I^{er}. They asked him to give them work.

"What kind of work?" he asked.

"To nurse the sick," they answered.

"You gain your livelihood, then, by nursing the sick?"

"Yes, Father," answered the elder of the two.

"Very good, but I have no sick people for you to nurse; but you may return shortly, I will see what I can do for you."

They returned a little while later. The Father had failed in getting anyone to employ these two nurses who had fallen, as it were, from the clouds—or rather had been heaven-sent. But in the place of an employer a thought struck him.

"My children," he said, "do you love our Lord?"

"We do indeed."

"Do you feel you have the courage to undertake something for his sake?"

"Certainly."

"Then go on with your work of nursing the sick; if the rich apply for your services allow them to pay for them—that is only fair—but do not refuse to nurse the poor; give them your services freely without expecting to be repaid, and do this always."

Père Pernet thought he read on the countenance of the younger of the two visitors that he had failed in gaining her for the cause he had at heart. The other accepted all he proposed, and as he proposed it. The first ended by marrying and so separated herself from her companion. Marie Maire, the one who remained faithful to her engagements, took a room in the Rue Vanneau in partnership with another young woman who shared her views. A few weeks later they were joined

by a third person. In the month of June of the same year 1864, the three nurses, having placed their little enterprise under the protection of the Sacred Heart, set to work in a manner worthy of all praise. They had a few paying patients in the beginning, but before long they agreed that they would in future only nurse the poor, and this became a fundamental principle with them from which they never departed.

This first start in the Rue Vanneau lasted nearly a year, during which time these three good women lived together like sisters; a time which, though it had its trials, had also its consolations. Their little rule of life had only the sanction of their goodwill and their desire to make themselves pleasing to God. So far they were without a superior; Providence provided them with one in May, 1865.

Let us here pause for a moment while we tell the story of the venerable Mother whom Heaven had singled out for this work which had just come into existence.

The Life of the Rev. Mother Marie de Jésus would have been written long ere this if it had not been for Père Pernet's humility. He was formally opposed to its being made known to the public out of apprehension that his own share in this admirable work should be revealed.

Rev. Mother Marie de Jésus was born on November 7, 1824, in Paris, in the parish of the Foreign Missions, in the same year about four months later than Père Pernet, who was destined to be the head, as she may be said to have been the heart, of the religious family which they brought into being. Providence decreed that Antoinette Fage should have before her eyes from her

earliest years some of the moral and physical sufferings which it was later on to be her mission to combat or alleviate. Her father had begun by being in the army; he afterwards adopted the profession of fencing-master. He abandoned his wife while Antoinette was yet a child, leaving them to a poverty which was akin to utter destitution. Her mother had to work for her living and for her child's; their mutual love was the one bright spot in this sad and poverty-stricken home. And love seems to have been the guiding star of Antoinette's existence. We are told that, from the age of five, she used to assemble the children in the neighbourhood and sing with them and even preach little sermons to them. If these years which passed thus might be called the happy years of her childhood, they passed quickly; for when she was twelve years old she lost her mother to whom she was so tenderly devoted, and of whom she could never speak in later years without shedding tears. In losing her mother in truth Antoinette lost all she had in the world. Her father married again, and Antoinette heard nothing more of him till the news reached her some years afterwards of his death.

But Providence watched over this child of predilection. The Sisters of Charity of the parish of Gros Caillou, in which she was then living, took an interest in her, and under their care she made her First Communion. She was later on adopted by kind friends in whom she might have found the happiness of family life had not Providence seen fit to subject her to further trials. While she was at the age of growth and development, an accident happened to her; she had a fall on a staircase which injured her spine. To stop a curvature which might have been fatal, she had to submit to

painful operations which had to be repeated year after year, with the result that she ceased to grow. These severe shocks in no way abated her courage or her strength of mind. Though she was never without pain, she managed to provide for her maintenance so as not to be a burden to the friends who had taken her in and who nursed her with loving devotion. In this way she reached her twentieth year.

But at the same time that her sufferings grew her aspirations increased, and became daily more holy and ardent. She thirsted for God, and was on fire with longing to do good to all who were in pain or in sorrow. The small economies she was able to make on the money she earned by needlework were expended in charity; to all those who were in trouble who applied to her, she gave moral or physical help. She always found the means of consoling them; her faith and confidence in God stood her in the place of resources. In spite of her self-forgetfulness and that she looked upon herself as worthy of contempt and neglect, she found herself looked up to and sought by all who came to know her. Notwithstanding her infirmity, there was something noble and superior about her which gave her an appearance of dignity and distinction. People were attracted by her very appearance as well as by her words and her innate goodness. Her efforts were specially directed to the protection of young girls who, when earning their livelihood in towns, are frequently deprived of home-influence and consequently are exposed to great temptations. Her influence over these was remarkable, and she spared no efforts to save them. By a singular coincidence, while Père Pernet was working at Nîmes on behalf of the children belonging to the beneficent

society there, Mlle. Fage was doing the same in Paris as member of an association to which the name of our Lady of Good Counsel had been given, one of whose objects was the protection of young girls.

Her frail health forbade her to entertain for a moment the thought of consecrating herself to God in a religious life; she looked upon her infirmities as a sign that God's will for her did not lie in that direction; on the other hand, she sought to approach as closely as she could to it by joining the Third Order of St Dominic. She was then thirty-five years of age. She took at her profession the name of St Catherine of Siena, a saint who was so eminent for her spiritual gifts and her good works.

The truly Christian life led by Antoinette Fage thus increased daily in fervour and piety. She loved nothing so much as hearing the word of God preached, and her remarkably retentive memory enabled her to pass on what she had heard with profit to herself, to those who leant on her for advice and guidance. Her piety was of that simple kind which attained its end without any (to use a familiar expression) beating about the bush; actions appealed more to her than special devotions.

Providence was truly leading her by the hand. The President of the Association of our Lady of Good Counsel, who, like all those whom Antoinette was associated with, had a high opinion of her, spoke in terms of admiration of her to the Comtesse M. and her daughter, who were members of the Third Order of St Dominic. These ladies were looking out at that time for a trustworthy person to whom they could confide the management of an orphanage which they had just founded, consisting of twelve or fourteen young girls

who had not yet made their First Communion. The object of this work was to prepare them to make it, and to give them a home where they could be taught to work and would be fortified in the practices of their religion till they attained the age of twenty-one. These good ladies begged Antoinette to accept the post, and she did so, feeling that this was a mission which fulfilled all her aspirations.

It is impossible to describe the good she did whilst employed in this work. Suffice it to say that it gave the remarkable qualities with which she was endowed an opportunity of expanding: namely, her large heart, her elevated mind, her sure judgement, her quickness of vision which was united to great simplicity and candour; her energy, her wide aspect of things and characters; finally the power she had of carrying the burdens of life joyfully and lightening their weight on others by her gaiety and *entraîn*. In that diminutive, misshapen body there was in truth an astounding amount of moral vigour, enough to communicate it—as she undoubtedly did—to those who surrounded her. It was impossible to be bored in her company, or to feel monotony beside her.

Antoinette would willingly have given up her life to the care of these orphans, by whom she was greatly loved and who found a new mother in her, had not circumstances manifested clearly to her that God had other designs for her.

CHAPTER VI

Too little doth he love thee, who loves anything with thee, which he loveth not for thee.—ST AUGUSTINE.

WE have already seen in the preceding chapter that Père Pernet had come across the first elements of the scheme which he had in view. What he had now to find, and he besieged Heaven to discover to him, was someone who would unite these disconnected links. About this time the name of Antoinette Fage came to his knowledge as being at the head of an orphanage and having the reputation of always being ready to help those in distress. He accordingly applied to her on the subject of a teacher who was out of place and in dire want.

This first interview was described to us by Antoinette herself from a note she had made of it at the time. The impossibility in which she found herself of acceding to Père Pernet's request led her to confide the fact to him that the good she was able to do in the work she was engaged in was very limited. Then, encouraged by the impression of kindness and holiness which she perceived in her visitor, God permitted that she should break through the reserve she generally kept on the subject of her trials. In the first place she told him of some of the difficulties she had to contend with, and then owned that she was on the point of giving up her situation. The Father expressed his astonishment that she should think of abandoning a position which offered so many opportunities of doing good. But whilst listening to her, he received an inward intimation that this was the person whom God had reserved for the work he was in course of starting. Nevertheless,

he gave no outward sign of what was passing in his mind. Before leaving her, he encouraged her to persevere in her work of self-sacrifice, and at the same time, he put himself at her service in case she should require help. He also inwardly resolved that he would not resort to any means to make her give up her situation till it pleased God to give him a convincing proof of his divine Will. He had not long to wait before he received this proof.

Antoinette Fage on her side, had been deeply penetrated by a wholly supernatural impression whilst receiving this unexpected visitor, and she was heard to say directly afterwards: "I do not know how to explain it to myself, but it seems to me this Father will count for something in my life." And she was not mistaken.

A few months later she encountered an additional trial. Her director, a Dominican Father, was sent to preach missions in country places which would necessitate his absence from Paris for some time. These absences caused by the apostolic life of a Friar Preacher, were a great cross to Antoinette. On this occasion, she bethought herself of the plan of asking Père Pernet to be her confessor whilst still relying on Père Faucillon as her director. She accordingly wrote to Père Pernet to that effect. His answer was as follows:

"I also had not forgotten you; the remembrance of you and the good work you are engaged in has remained with me ever since the interview I had with you. But as in all good things, and perhaps specially in such circumstances as these, one should know how to wait, I waited. Yes, I say it in all simplicity that I waited for you to apply to me or that the divine Master should give me some other sign of his Will in the matter. You can come accordingly, and I can assure you I willingly

place the small powers which, by the grace of God, I have at my disposal, to second your ardent desire to devote yourself to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Let us then love God with all our hearts and be prepared to give ourselves now, and till the end of our lives, to his service. It is in him that I have the honour to remain your devoted servant

“PERNET.”

Matters were therefore arranged on this basis: the Father agreed to act as Antoinette's confessor, and was thus brought in closer relations with her. He made her feel at this time that her sanctification was the sole object he had in view and said nothing of his projects. On June 14, 1864, she wrote as follows:

“If God should inspire you to be my guide and counsellor in the way of perfection, it is indispensable that you should work at the subjugation of my natural activity. . . . You may trust in my goodwill, but not in the ardour of my desires. I am not sufficiently grounded in the way of renunciation and self-sacrifice. I require to feel myself helped, supported, encouraged—not to feel myself alone and abandoned in my hours of weakness and discouragement—and to find the protection and affection of a father in the zeal of a director. I found all this in my dear Dominican family; but how often I have seen these ties broken to which I thought myself so strongly bound! . . . And this has served to render ineffectual the effort which I have made to conquer the timidity I feel in the confessional. May I be permitted to hope, Father, that God in sending me to you has put a term to my difficulties. I have prayed so hard for this grace that he cannot have turned a deaf ear to my voice. If then you should, by God's inspiration, be moved to help me, I would abandon all my miseries in your hands for you to remedy the evil you see in me. This is perhaps rashness on my part, and I may be asking you for what is beyond my strength, for

nature may take its revenge. I am aware of its great feebleness. I know that I shall strive against your advice; that the pressure you may put upon me may be very displeasing to me; no matter, with God's help it will be all to the good. I think I can perceive the end in view. It is great enough to excite my utmost endeavours. It must not be said of me that I can work courageously and with a good will for material objects and only feebly and in a lukewarm manner for God. I require to be led, to be found fault with and corrected. I give myself wholly into your hands should such be God's good pleasure. Do with me whatever you will, whether against me or in spite of me. I offer you my will in all its plenitude. . . . I do not know if I explain my meaning, I am so ignorant that though I know what I wish to say, I do not know how to say it."

She writes once more a few days later:

"I have felt myself drawn to you in some mysterious manner such as I have never felt before. In spite of this I waited. But I am convinced that it was due to the providence of God that I came across you at a moment when, being on the eve of coming to an important decision, I was in need of advice and support."

Père Pernet answered this appeal in the following paternal manner:

"Your letter contains a resolution which asks for a corresponding one on my side. . . . You wish to go to our Lord, and you ask for a sure and enlightened guide for this difficult but beautiful journey. That is well, and with all my heart I approve of it. But what a serious matter is this for you and for him to whom you look for guidance! If it was only a question of devotedness I could perhaps promise it to you without fear of rashness. Yes, I think I may say I love souls who love God or who seek the surest means of loving him or of making him loved. But this would not suffice to meet

the wants of generous souls. Many rare qualities such as enlightenment and prudence, besides special graces, are required as well as devotedness. Do I dare to recognise them in myself? . . . And yet should I reject your request? I do not think I ought to do so, and as our Lord has brought us together in such an unexpected way, it is because, in my opinion, he wills that we should on our side, each of us, try to correspond with his views and his holy Will.

"I come to your assistance, therefore, without any preconceived opinions or systems born of the imagination, knowing my unworthiness and incapacity, but ready to help you with advice according to what I believe to be in the spirit of Jesus Christ to the extent of my feeble ability.

"As to you, my child, do what you can; your goodwill is the guarantee of success. Goodwill always effects its purpose; and if you give yourself generously and with a right heart to your divine Master, you will never wander from the path whatever I may say or do. He would never suffer you to do so. Rather would he endow me, unworthy as I am, with special lights than let me lead you astray. I may go even further. You should forget the individual in me in order to see only an instrument which God for a time makes use of so as to give your goodwill the merit of a blind obedience. Nothing costs God too much, or is too difficult for him. He wills to take entire possession of your life and your heart. He it is who will fulfil the ardent longing for affection which devours you. You will become a saint: that is, a passionate lover of humility and sacrifice founded in obedience—an obedience, however (I repeat), which is given to God. In doing this, I trust you will help me, myself, to sanctify my soul. . . . Offer yourself, if possible, a thousand times a day as a victim whose only desire is to die for him and his glory. One last remark: Is not your Dominican family, which I esteem and love as highly as you do, still ready to put itself at your service? Think this over and do not exchange a precious stone for one which has not even

the appearance, still less the intrinsic value of the other. I say this in all sincerity because I say, once again, all I desire is your good and that you should become a saint."

These quotations may be excused, as they throw light on the simplicity and beauty of these two souls, and God's leading of them.

"From that moment," related Antoinette Fage, "I was at peace, without misgiving as to the course I had taken troubling me for a moment. I continued by an exchange of letters with my employers to prepare for my departure; at least that was my intention, but Père Pernet so contrived that it was delayed for a year. Then, fearing doubtless that my children did not give me sufficient occupation, he did not hesitate to send me all the lost and unfortunate cases that he had to deal with."

Finally, a circumstance took place early in May, 1865, which gave a clear indication that the time had come when it was God's will that Antoinette should give up the direction of the orphanage. Accordingly, he signified this to her. Her surprise was great when she received this intimation and it amounted wellnigh to stupefaction when Père Pernet told her of the choice that he had made of her as superior for his work of nurses for the poor.

Without doubting the value of this mission or its future success, she could not help objecting to being chosen for a post for which she felt herself physically and morally unfitted.

"But, Father," she urged, "I cannot suppose that you wish to make me a nun, still less a nurse! My health must always be an obstacle to both vocations.

Also I have neither the qualities nor virtues required for the part which you wish me to take in the training of these young girls you have brought together."

Père Pernet put a stop to all these protestations, reminding her of the entire abandonment she had made of herself to the will of God—an abandonment which should become more perfect and more thorough every day. He then caused her to hasten her departure from the orphanage, and, having concluded an arrangement on the subject with his superior Père Picard, he decided to send her at once to Auteuil to spend some time with the community of the Order of the Assumption. Antoinette arrived there on January 1, 1865.

Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, the foundress of the Order of the Assumption—a woman who was remarkable for her great piety and talents—received the humble Antoinette Fage (the *chétive* mother as she loved to call herself in after days) as a sister and friend. Besides showing her every mark of sincere affection, the Superior-General gave her all the necessary encouragement to fortify her in the career which had been marked out for her.

"She was unsparing in her kindness to me," Antoinette related afterwards. "She sent frequently for me; we talked of the poor and of the mission for which I was preparing myself; she reassured me, promising me her help and her counsels. She had confided me to the care of Mother Françoise Eugénie, who used to come daily to spend some time with me. Mother Marie Eugénie's conversation was that of a saint; all her ambition was to love God and save souls. The poor above all excited her compassion. 'I envy you your happiness,' she used to say repeatedly. 'How happy

you ought to be ! Never will you be able to thank God sufficiently for such a grace.' ”

It was not only in these ways that the Superior-General showed her interest. The first meetings at which Père Pernet and Antoinette Fage sought to interest the former pupils of the Assumption in the humble efforts of the Nurses of the Poor (as they were then called) took place at Auteuil.

The good Father came every day to see Antoinette during the period of her stay at the Convent of the Assumption to discuss the plans of his much-loved work with her: a work to which she also was prepared to dedicate herself heart and soul. Together they composed a rule of life for the interior life of the community, and also one fitted for that led by those whose time would be taken up by their work for the sick.

“ The Father,” she wrote later on, “ never ceased to excite me to confidence in our Lord and his Blessed Mother.”

“ We require it, my child,” he used to say, “ because there are great difficulties in the work we have undertaken. Everything about it, the end and the means, are supernatural. We wish to do a great thing, but as we are nothing and we have nothing, God must be all, and in all, that concerns it. We must expect trials from God and contradictions on the part of men. We shall pass for fools in the sight of men and for people who are out of their senses. We shall be persecuted, despised from without and within. We shall have the crushing trials of poverty, for we shall possess nothing and gain nothing. The absolute necessities of life may be wanting to you—that is, bread, clothes, fuel to warm you in the rigour of wintry weather. We shall have to

put up with trying characters and contradictions; and, without ever ceasing to work at our personal sanctification, we shall have to conceive a great zeal for the formation of our children to the religious life and to the practice of all the virtues."

These prophetic words of Père Pernet's show how completely he had grasped the situation and counted the cost of what he had undertaken; they were fulfilled to the letter. Nevertheless Antoinette did not shrink from the task put before her. She did not draw back. In the days when the Father had first put his plans before her, she had hesitated, but she said: "If I accept, I feel with the grace of God my courage will not be wanting; for I have already had experience of such trials in the work I am giving up. I feel in me the courage to struggle and to suffer even at the cost of my life."

She had accepted, and her self-surrender was final. In the month of July, 1865, she joined the little community which already was finding the quarters in the Rue Vanneau too confined for it, and which was about to move into No. 233, Rue St Dominique. The work may be said to have taken its definite start from this time, though its beginnings date from the year 1864.

Antoinette Fage met with a joyful reception; each member of the society realised that they would find a mother in her, and a mother who would rise to the height of the mission confided to her.

The following testimony which Père Manuel, a Dominican and a man of God (who died in 1892), gave of her, marks her as a worthy co-operator of Père Pernet:

"I have, unfortunately, no letters of hers. She rarely wrote, and when she did so her letters were brief. But in the few lines I received from her, as in her conversa-

tions when she had spoken most fully and most effusively, I always found the same fundamental characteristics: a great tenderness of heart and inexhaustible charity, immense zeal for souls, a firm and enlightened intelligence in the formation of views and plans, and a rare strength of will and decision in carrying them into execution. Hers was in truth a privileged soul. Deeply loved by God, she loved him deeply in a life of self-immolation and sacrifice. To use an expression of St Vincent de Paul's, she loved God 'with the sweat of her brow.' That is the great sign, and she was always giving proof of possessing it. I had known her from the time she was at the head of Mme. M.'s orphanage, and when I saw her again in 1878, I noticed how her character had grown and strengthened. Calm, tender, a tower of strength to others, herself a model of humility and self-sacrifice, she appeared to live in ignorance of the rare gifts she had received from God. She had, at last, found in Père Pernet's work an outlet for faculties which are rarely found in one person, and which our Lord only gives to those to whom he intrusts the mission of founding or developing a work: namely the gifts of piety, a warm heart, zeal for souls, intelligence and a firm will. All these she had in a large measure."

CHAPTER VII

The life of every good Christian is a continual desire towards God.—ST AUGUSTINE.

SHORTLY after the installation in Rue St Dominique, Antoinette Fage (who had been given the name of Mother Marie de Jésus by Père Pernet) found herself at the head of a community of eight persons, and the life of the Nursing Sisters became from that time more regular and defined.

In the interior of the house they applied themselves to the practices suitable to those who desire to consecrate themselves to God by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; outside of it they submitted to a rule with regard to the poor they visited which was distinguished by its wisdom and prudence, and which sustained them in their work of self-devotion whilst it directed it in the right channels. Trials, needless to say, were not wanting. The Father had foreseen and predicted them. Some came from within, some from without. They were spared none. The work had not as yet met with a success which justified it; without resources, credit or support, it had to contend with opposition or indifference. The greater number of people to whom an appeal was made declined to believe in the future of a work which was opposed, beforehand, to all maxims of worldly wisdom, and they did not hesitate to call it a piece of folly. But disappointments, ridicule, contempt, bitter calumnies even, never succeeded in tiring the courage of the founders. On one occasion, after a day of special suffering and trial, Mother Marie de Jésus wrote as follows to the Father:

“ If God endows this little work with life and deigns

to preserve me as its mother, I shall not have given birth to it without pain. What tortures, what trials have I had, and at every moment! When in one direction matters appear to calm down, they get worse in another. What consoles me and gives me reason to thank God is that though these repeated blows affect my health they have no other effect on me. They do not discourage me. God is on my side, and he will support me and will never permit me to fail through cowardice in this noble task." In another place she writes: "How well I now understand what courage and what virtues were required by those who have been called by God to make foundations . . . for if one has to suffer so much for what is a mere nothing, what will become of us if we live to see something come of our present efforts?"

About this time Père Pernet writes to her: "I praise God and thank him for his merciful designs in our regard. Never can we accomplish anything to his glory without sufferings. We should not perhaps have the courage to impose them on ourselves in order to carry out this work. It is he who lays them on our shoulders. Accordingly it is by his wish that we have them. He renders our work fruitful by their means. May he be blessed for ever. Look upon yourself as a chosen victim; suffer, resign yourself and love Jesus in your sufferings. Put aside the trials that worry you, and be full of confidence. I believe we are in the right way."

Both one and the other relied on our Lord, and it was not in vain they trusted him.

None the less, when confronted with the extreme poverty of this venture, the Father—or perhaps we should say the religious—had a moment of panic.

Sure as he felt of what God asked of him, he never doubted that the work should continue to be occupied solely with the poor, but was he, a religious, justified in taking upon himself the responsibility of a community of women who were pledged to live henceforth and for ever entirely on alms? Should he not confide his fears to his Superior, to receive the assurance from one who stood in the place of God to him that he was not labouring under a delusion? He did so with the happiest result. Père d'Alzon had already encouraged his son in his enterprise, and Père Picard who was at the head of the community in the Rue François I^{er}, to Père Pernet's great joy, also gave his full approval to the resolution now formally made by the new society, to nurse the poor only.

From this time he was completely reassured on the subject; never was there any question again of nursing the rich; it was dismissed for ever.

The humble apartment in the Rue St Dominique did not bear the remotest resemblance to a religious house in its externals. It consisted in a little oratory neatly but simply adorned, a community-room, refectory, a dormitory and a tiny room which was used as a parlour. The furnishings of the house were even on an inferior scale: six chairs which had to be moved from community-room to refectory or to parlour according to the place at which they were required, two or three worn-out pots and pans, two shaky tables which required to be propped so that they should maintain their equilibrium, and a cupboard without lock or key were all that the community possessed in the way of household furniture.



MÈRE MARIE DE JÉSUS, CO-FOUNDRESS AND FIRST
SUPERIOR-GENERAL OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF
THE ASSUMPTION.

The Sisters had no anxiety about food. Trusting to the divine promise, they patiently awaited their daily bread from the hand of their Heavenly Father. God more than once willed to test their confidence by appearing deaf to their prayer; and Mother Marie de Jésus found herself in the position of having to provide for the subsistence of the community with sums of ten, twelve or fifteen sous, which was all the money she had at her disposal.

The Sisters were frequently reduced to the necessity of begging for tickets of public soup-kitchens to avoid dying of starvation. In spite of their dire poverty, they never departed from a rule or custom which they had observed from the beginning, which was that of providing for the wants of at least one poor family, and they looked upon this custom almost in the light of a duty. Mother Marie de Jésus made a point of going to make the first visit to any poor family who had been recommended to their notice.

On one occasion of this sort, she came across a woman and a child living in a miserable garret, the child bearing unmistakable signs of bad health. Lifting herself up from the truckle-bed on which she was lying, the woman attacked her visitor in a voice of fury, saying: "Who has given you information about us? We don't want you here." Mother Marie de Jésus, without showing any resentment at this discouraging reception, soon ascertained that the poor woman, who was evidently superior to her surroundings, was suffering from the pangs of hunger. But what could Mother Marie do? All the wealth of the community was in her pocket, and it comprised the sum of five sous. For a moment she hesitated. Should she deprive her daughters of a meal in order to

feed this stranger? Necessity might urge prudence, but faith and love triumphed.

“My God!” she ejaculated, “the money is not mine to give, so, as I cannot give it, I will lend it to you.”

She then went out and bought bread, which was hungrily devoured by the mother and child.

On her way back to rejoin her community she was stopped in the road by some person who pressed five francs into her hand. Our Lord had accepted the bargain and returned the money she had lent him with interest.

The Sisters had often nothing to give but their lives, but these they gave with the utmost generosity.

One of the first who devoted themselves to this work of charity was called by God to himself on the Octave of the Assumption, 1866. She was attacked by cholera whilst nursing a patient suffering from that disease and was carried off in less than three days. Mother Marie de Jésus was also taken ill with cholera, and was forced to take to her bed at the same time as Sister Marie Denise. But though the terrible malady shook her feeble frame, it did not conquer her force of will. Forgetting her own pains, she gave all her care and attention to her suffering daughter.

When all hope of saving Sister Marie Denise’s life was at an end, she caused herself to be carried to the bedside of the dying girl and comforted and encouraged her with loving words, and, with a hand trembling from weakness and exhaustion, gave her a last blessing. Comforted by her Superior’s words, and the ministry of the holy founder who visited her throughout her brief illness, Sister Marie Denise offered herself generously as a sacrifice to God for the good of the newly

founded Congregation. She had indeed merited a great reward, for in the two years—or less—of her religious life she had struggled heroically to overcome repugnances which had at first appeared almost invincible. She had nursed a poor woman for many months who was suffering from ulcers which emitted a revolting smell, and these she had daily to poultice. Thus, unknowingly, she was preparing her soul for the supreme sacrifice which was to be asked of her. Her death was that of the just: one of peace and resignation.

Père Pernet, though he felt the loss of this first victim of divine love deeply, surrendered her patiently to the Master, feeling sure that she would in heaven reap many graces for the work. And he was not mistaken. The little family took a fresh start, and vocations were multiplied, volunteers came from all parts to join the ranks of the Pernettes—as in the beginning they were commonly called. This name grievously annoyed the humble founder, who protested strongly against it. It was, however, some time before the “Nurses of the Poor” took definitely the name, by which they were to be permanently designated, of the “Little Sisters of the Assumption.”

Great stress was laid on the word “little”; the Father never ceased to remind them that, as the last Congregation in the Church, the least important in the family of the Assumption, it behoved them to be very little among the little, humble amongst the humble, the feeble, the misunderstood, those ignored, abandoned by the world and disdained by it. No mystery could suit them better as children of the Blessed Virgin than that of her Assumption, for were they not called to open the kingdom of heaven to many souls?

The house in the Rue St Dominique soon became too small for them, and a house rented in the Passage Gaillard soon after was in its turn condemned for the same reason. In 1868 the Little Sisters established themselves in the parish of St Philippe du Roule under the paternal care of the Rector, M. l'Abbé de Borie, who, besides befriending them in every way, put them in part possession of a building in the Rue de Monceau which also sheltered other good works, including one under the care of the Sisters of Charity. Not only did these worthy daughters of St Vincent de Paul rejoice at being brought into closer relations with the Little Sisters, but their excellent Superior, *Ma Sœur* Bigourdan, went herself to fetch them and install them in their new abode. This good Sister showed from the first a truly fraternal interest in the newly founded society; she seized every opportunity of proving it by coming to Mother Marie's assistance by every means in her power. Her encouragements were also deeply appreciated by Mother Marie. *Ma Sœur* Bigourdan used to tell her that the Little Sisters would supplement the Sisters of Charity's work by doing what they were unable to do.

"We nurse the sick in hospitals," she repeated more than once. "We visit them in their own homes and give them all the assistance in our power, but we cannot establish ourselves at their bedside all the time they are ill. We have to leave them, and that is always a grief to us. St Vincent looking down from heaven must rejoice that you are going to fill up this gap."

These two souls understood each other perfectly, and entertained a holy friendship for each other, which, interrupted for a time by death, is now being renewed

in heaven. The name of *Ma Sœur* Bigourdan will always be held in veneration by the family of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The daughters of Père Pernet and Mother Marie de Jésus look upon it as a duty to put on record her generous assistance, and to number it among the providential occurrences which surround the cradle of their Congregation.

Three years later it was found necessary to look for an installation which would provide for the future wants of the community, which was now beginning to multiply rapidly. Neither the poverty, nor the persecution, nor the thousand difficulties which a new foundation has to encounter, and which are inseparable from it, appeared to daunt these souls "of goodwill." Vocations constantly presented themselves, and the two founders neglected no means of sustaining the courage and fortifying the spirit of faith and generosity in the souls of those whom God confided to their care.

The community continued to make progress in the virtues of a religious life. Besides the Rule of St Augustine upon which their Congregation was founded, they observed the constitutions laid down by their founder, which were especially adapted to their work. In order that the Sisters should have more time to devote to the sick, Père Pernet anxiously awaited the time when they would have a chapel of their own where they could perform their spiritual exercises. Thus, by rising at an early hour, they could make their prayer together, recite the Office in choir and assist at the Holy Sacrifice without leaving the convent. Owing to insufficiency of accommodation, these hopes had not so far been realised.

Accordingly Père Pernet, early in the year 1870, set

about finding a suitable abode for his religious family. With this object he searched all the poor and thickly populated quarters of Paris from end to end, at first without result. But when paying a visit to the parish priest of Grenelle his attention was accidentally drawn to an uninhabited house. On his return he said: "I believe I have found what would suit us as a permanent location. But for us it would be a palace! Never should we be able to manage to secure it. . . . My children, we must pray; God will have to come to our rescue."

It was indeed our good God who had led his steps to this house. After having been occupied by Turks and used as a college for the students belonging to that nation, it became the mother-house of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. There was accommodation in it as it stood, without need of addition, for sixty nuns. All the same, how could a Congregation whose means hardly sufficed to supply its members with daily bread dream of securing a property of—relatively—considerable value! Only a prodigy of divine Providence could have effected it. Père Pernet and Mother Marie de Jésus had such confidence in God's goodness that they thought such a prodigy quite natural; and it was accomplished.

Ten thousand francs were wanting when the first payment was due, and the whole sum had to be paid at the risk of having the contract cancelled. Fervent prayers were offered up; the little community recommended this intention specially to St Joseph's intercession. The Father offered up the Holy Sacrifice on the day when the deed of transfer had to be signed in supplication of our divine Saviour that he would not

abandon his little servants. He had made his thanksgiving and was leaving the church when a friend of the Order of the Assumption, though not one who had been brought into personal relations with Père Pernet, placed a cheque for nearly 10,000 francs in his hands.

It was in the month of March, 1870, that the Little Sisters of the Assumption took possession of their new abode, leaving a little colony of five nuns in the Rue Monceau. Before matters were properly organised Père Pernet, by the invitation of Père d'Alzon, accompanied him to Rome, where the Vatican Council was being held. The time coincided with the blessing of the new chapel and the anxieties attending on a new installation. Still Père Pernet did not hesitate; he took pleasure, in his humility, in effacing himself when it was a case of inaugurating the headquarters of his great work.

A room which had been previously used for the study of the Koran was converted into a chapel, and the Curé of Grenelle, with the approval of the Archbishop, who had ever shown the greatest interest in the undertaking, blessed it. Père Picard came the following day to celebrate the first Mass and, to the great joy of Mother Marie, to reserve the Blessed Sacrament. It was there in the presence of our Lord in his Eucharistic life that Mother Marie de Jésus and her daughters were to find their solace and their strength.

The letters which Père Pernet addressed to the community from Rome are eloquent of the feelings evoked by his pilgrimage.

"I cannot describe to you all my emotions since I came here. This morning I assisted at a Papal Mass in St Peter's. I saw our Holy Father close by. I am

still full of the impression he left upon me. I have been several times to St Peter's, a basilica which is the greatest marvel of Rome, and one of the greatest of the world. It makes one realise when one is there the greatness of God and man's nothingness and misery before him. I have twice seen the Holy Father at a very short distance. How much everyone loves him and how much cause he gives people to love him! He has been asked to give me an audience, and that day will assuredly be a great day in my life. I am preparing for it by making a note of all the blessings I wish him to give and all the requests I have to ask of him. If the presence of God manifests itself in Rome, the devil has his innings too. One has to fight not only against a heat which melts the very marrow of one's bones and against insects which suck one's blood pitilessly, but also against the temptation to let one's mind be taken up by the worldly and pleasant side of things. . . . I beg of you to pray very specially for the Council. The devil would like to get a footing there and put difficulties in the way of the triumph of truth which, the more it is proclaimed, the more it threatens his reign. . . . It will not be long before we meet again, my dear children. I rejoice with you over the possession of your little chapel. I shall have the happiness of bringing you often together there at our Lord's feet."

On June 22, he writes: "I and fifty-six others had an audience yesterday evening with the Pope. I took his hand and kissed it, and then I threw myself at his feet and embraced them."

Finally, on June 30, he writes: "I propose leaving Rome—dear Rome—on Thursday next, and, not being rich, I shall make my journey without unnecessary delay."

All that I shall be able to do is to visit our Lady of Loreto and pay my devotions at her shrine. . . . O my daughter, how sweet are the emotions which Rome evokes! They move one to the depth of one's soul. Death and martyrdom are in the very air, and the thought of the life to come; the life that makes everything in this miserable world appear wretched and worthless. Oh, how much I should like to be a saint! If you only knew how much I pray for you and our daughters and for our poor little work."

The Father's return to Grenelle filled every heart with joy. He arrived full of the holy impressions he had received in Rome, and laden with the blessings which the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX had bestowed on the community of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. He had been told by the mouth of the founder of their devotion to him, and their desire to work for the extension of God's reign and the salvation of souls. That illustrious Pope had several times before given his blessing to the newly founded Congregation, and he again expressed his joy and satisfaction on hearing from the founder of the good it was doing. Every word of encouragement from the Vicar of Jesus Christ, which was to Père Pernet a direct approbation coming from our Lord himself and confirming the work of which he was the author, filled him with unspeakable joy. And this was but a prelude of the favours accorded by the Church later on.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption after coming to life under the glorious pontificate of Pius IX were to receive the confirmation of their Rule under that of Leo XIII.

CHAPTER VIII

The word of the new Jerusalem is *Vocaberis voluntas mea in ea.*—FÉNELON.

THE war between France and Prussia broke out a very short time after the Little Sisters had installed themselves at Grenelle. Père Pernet, seeing only his country's danger and the means which could be taken to go to her assistance, made up his mind early in August to go as chaplain to the forces and join the army of Metz. He wrote the following lines to Grenelle just before starting:

“My very dear child Marie de Jésus and my other dear children, I have no time to go and give you my blessing once more before my departure. I go bearing you all in my heart and filled with the desire of sacrificing my life: first to expiate my sins; secondly for you all that you should become saints; thirdly for the good of our work—that God should bless it and make it bear fruit; fourthly for France, in order that I may work for the souls of our soldiers and for all other souls. . . . To conclude, I go for the greater honour and glory of God.

“I beg you to pray for Père Vincent de Paul, who accompanies me, at the same time as you pray for me. I shall be with you constantly, if not always in spirit. Courage! Let us give ourselves entirely to our Lord. Till we meet again. I shall have left the Rue François I^{er} before seven to-night. We join the army at Nancy.”

The shock produced on the little community by this letter may be easily imagined. To Mother Marie de Jésus the anguish was so great that she could not speak of it even many years later without emotion. There,

also, she gave proof of her holy strength of mind; forgetful of herself, she strove to be both father and mother to this much-loved work the sole responsibility of which was laid upon her feeble shoulders.

To sustain by unceasing prayer and an ever greater self-devotion the Father who was exposed to all kinds of dangers, and to go to her country's succour by instantly starting an ambulance: such was the programme traced by Mother Marie, and which she carried out during the period of the war, and afterwards when it was succeeded by the temporary success of the Commune.

Père Pernet wrote as follows from Metz, August 14 :

“ We entered Metz this morning after many adventures, and after having overcome many difficulties. But we were not at the end of our troubles. There was not a house or a room to be had. All were full; even the public squares being crowded by country people who have taken refuge within the walls and fortifications of Metz in their fear of the enemy's approach. Not knowing where to go, guess what we did ! We took refuge in an unoccupied cart which we found in the Place des Halles. Our bed was supported by four wheels, our bedding consisted of two trusses of hay, one placed in the opening in front and the other at the back of the wagon. We had a cloak for bed-clothes, the heavens for ceiling, and there we tried to sleep. I succeeded but indifferently, Père Vincent de Paul a little better. . . . We intend starting to-night, or at latest to-morrow morning, to join the ambulances and the army.”

An account of Père Vincent de Paul, Père Pernet's companion, gives us the conclusion of that day's history :

“ Having visited the Bishop at his palace and pro-

cured from him papers authorising our ministry, Père Pernet and I directed our steps to the field of battle. On our way there, we met cartloads of poor people, and Père Pernet, more compassionate than I was, followed in their wake in order to hear their confessions. I went on in front, and we thus lost sight of each other for the rest of the day. Père Pernet, when he reached the gates of the city, climbed a height in order to see what was going on inside. He was taken up for a spy and, guarded by four soldiers armed with muskets and followed by an angry mob who wished to execute summary vengeance on him, he was marched off to the Town Hall. It took twenty minutes to reach his destination, during which time he was hissed and execrated by the crowd. One woman only, seeing him thus escorted, stood up in his defence."

"I can see her again," said Père Pernet, when relating this adventure. "She called out, 'Impossible! that man is not a spy. He looks far too kind and gentle.'"

"But," continues Père Vincent de Paul, "the vociferations of the mob went on increasing in violence in spite of the woman's protests, and some women even went so far as to strike him with their fists."

On his arrival at the Town Hall, he was asked: "What do you call the thing you wear on your shoulders?"

"A hood."

"Ah! that proves the point. We know for certain now that you are a spy."

The order was given that he should be thrown into prison. Père Pernet tried to justify himself, explaining that his papers of identification which he held from the Bishop and which authorised him to act as chaplain to wounded soldiers were in Père Vincent de Paul's

hands, from whom he had unfortunately got separated. He was not listened to, and was taken to a room in which there was not even a chair to sit on, and there he was shut up under lock and key.

The Commandant of the place came to him and said: "My dear Father, though I do not for a moment doubt your innocence, I don't know how to extricate you from the difficulty you are in, as the mob is greatly excited against you and is quite unmanageable."

The Father could only give Père Vincent de Paul's address and hope that he would soon come to his rescue. Meanwhile he recommended himself to God.

He had a long time to wait, and for some time was in painful suspense, and he could hear the cries of the excited people outside clamouring for his blood.

"The explanation of the cause of his arrest," wrote Père Vincent de Paul, "was a simple one: telegrams had spread the news in all directions that a spy was going about clad in a habit similar to ours. At one o'clock of the day the Father and I had separated, and it was only at three o'clock on the following morning that I was told what had occurred. I hastened to present the Bishop's letters, and the Father was at once set at liberty. After a short rest, we betook ourselves to the barracks to which the Bishop had directed us."

Later on when Père Pernet described this adventure, he said that it, in a faint manner, represented to him what our Lord must have felt on his way to Calvary when pursued by the shouts of fury and insults of the Jews.

On August 17 he wrote again to the community and gave them some details of the life he was leading, but without mentioning the adventure he had had three days previously:

“We are still alive. . . . We have just returned from the battle-field where a battle raged from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. In spite of the eight miles which Père Vincent de Paul and I covered this morning I feel none the worse, and we intend to spend the coming night on the battle-field if the fighting is renewed, as it is probable it will be. Our troops are splendid and full of fight. Many of the soldiers are delighted to have the opportunity of going to confession. Poor fellows! How one’s heart goes out to them when one is brought into contact with them. What courage they have to support fatigue and hunger, and what patience to endure the terrible tortures and wounds they receive! What an awful thing is war! Yesterday there were no less than 2,000 wounded. We are attached to an ambulance of 800 men.”

If Père Pernet had been able to keep the Little Sisters informed of his movements even by a few lines, undoubtedly the trial might have been lightened, but very soon circumstances rendered all correspondence impossible. He was shut up in Metz all the time the siege lasted, and he and Père Vincent de Paul continued to devote themselves to the sick and wounded. After the capitulation of the city, they followed the French soldiers who had become prisoners of war to Mayence, where the Bishop of Mayence, Mgr. Ketteler, showed them much kindness and made them lodge under his own roof while they continued their work of charity to their compatriots.

Meanwhile the Little Sisters were occupied in organising an ambulance at Grenelle. They cheerfully put the whole house at the disposition of the wounded soldiers, making use of the cellars as their dormitory

and reserving only one room for the accommodation of the community. The kitchen became their refectory. A benefactor provided them with a number of beds, which, with the addition of a few more lent by neighbours, brought the number up to forty-two. They accepted also the charge of forty more ambulances in the interior of Paris, so that from the month of September, 1870, to May, 1871, they were in charge of eighty beds.

The community were twenty-four in number before the war broke out, but before Paris was threatened, and it was still possible to leave it, Mother Marie de Jésus assembled her daughters, and, having laid the state of the case and her apprehensions for the future before them, gave them full liberty to depart if they felt they had not strength to support all trials and continue their work of self-sacrifice till the end. Five, amongst whom were four postulants, broke down under the test and asked permission to leave.

Those members of the Assumptionist Order who had not left Paris came frequently to visit the Sisters to sustain their courage, and to minister to the spiritual wants of the wounded. The task undertaken by the Sisters was indeed a heavy one. The house from this time was filled with soldiers, and for nearly a month they lived completely at the expense of the community, and the Sisters at that time deprived themselves of the very necessities of life in order to supply the wants of the sick and wounded men. Even when the State came to their assistance, they still had to submit to daily privations. Nor was this all; as we have already seen, Mother Marie de Jésus knew no limits to her large-heartedness, and she saw in that time of distress but

another claim on her self-sacrifice and devotion to her neighbour. Accordingly she offered an asylum to about twenty country people who were flying from the enemy. "One would have to be without bowels of compassion," she said, "if one could abandon those poor souls to their fate." Thus she and her daughters shared their last crust of bread with all who applied to them for help.

Another affliction befell the Little Sisters in addition to the rest and was a source of deep sorrow to them: it was the death of one of the earliest members of the company. Sister Marie Angèle (Élise Fischer) was a German; her death was a lingering one. She never ceased praying that France, her adopted country, might not suffer from the oppression of her native country which—notwithstanding—she loved above all. She had offered herself as a victim from the beginning of the war, and her simple, trustful soul had made an heroic act without thinking twice about it; and the sacrifice was accepted as there was nothing at the time to give reason to expect that she was nearing her end. Endowed with a warm heart and lively spirits, she had put all she had at the service of God and her Sisters, and she was the joy and edification of all around her. Her sallies of wit, uttered half in French and half in German, had the power of evoking smiles even in the saddest days. She was nursed with more than a mother's care by Mother Marie de Jésus, and the latter sought by every means in her power to make amends to her for the absence of the founder, whose return was ardently desired by the poor sufferer. Our Lord, perhaps to increase her merit, did not give her this consolation. She made a holy death on December 20, 1870, having previously pronounced her perpetual vows.

A letter from Père Pernet brought a ray of sunshine to the community on January 29, 1871:

“I am writing to you with a sad heart amidst the sound of cannons and of public criers announcing that France has submitted and Paris capitulated, but with the hope that at last I shall be able to return to you. I left with the expectation of not being away for long, and now six months have elapsed since we were separated. Almost immediately after we reached Metz the town was blockaded, and after Metz surrendered Paris was invested. We followed our prisoners to Germany. At first we were destined for Dresden, but later on Providence so arranged that we should go to Mayence on the left bank of the Rhine. Our mission to the sick and wounded has been full of consolation. For some time they numbered eighteen thousand. We have been in charge for the greater part of the time of the least cared-for ambulance, and the one which was furthest from the town. Thanks to the air-service, we were not entirely without news of you in Paris, though no news of us reached you. . . . How anxious I have been about you, and how much I have suffered in hearing of the ever-increasing scarcity of food, and on account of the barbarous bombardment which must be a continual source of danger to Grenelle, as that quarter has been the most exposed all the time to the enemy's shells. I had one consolation, however, in my worst moments—that of thinking that you had care of the wounded and sick, and therefore of showing your self-devotion at Grenelle as well as elsewhere.

“I heard from Auteuil that we had lost a daughter. Poor dear Sister Marie Angèle! I have made no mistake; it was her whom the divine Master has taken

to Himself, was it not? Oh that I had been there to prepare her to go before her divine Spouse! I have offered up Mass for her. How I long to see you again, to find you all again with one exception—or rather two, as X. took fright. She is no longer there where she expected to find peace and happiness. May our good God preserve her in spite of herself; a soul is much to be pitied who does not make the sacrifices God asks of it. I bless all our daughters. I have prepared some exercises for them to help them to become good and holy nuns. They are now working in the school of charity. May it profit them greatly.”

Père Pernet ended by begging the Rev. Mother to give him news about what was happening to them. But if news reached Paris from Germany the news from Paris did not succeed in reaching Germany, and many months more elapsed before he was relieved from suspense. Thus Père Vincent de Paul makes the remark to Père Picard in writing to him: “Père Pernet grows thinner and thinner, for all the shells falling over Grenelle pierce his heart.”

After seven days a few lines reached him; their brevity proves that great doubts were entertained that they would reach their destination.

“DEAR FATHER,

“In spite of the dangers to which we have been exposed God has preserved us from harm, and I have every hope that you will find all, or, if not all, at least those who have been, and will be, by the grace of God, the foundation and support of our work safely here on your return.”

The Father's answer is dated February, 1871, and bore the address of Vieux Leuse, Belgium. “Our

mission at Mayence has been abruptly broken off by the evacuation of our soldiers who have been sent to the centre of Germany. Père Vincent de Paul returns to Nîmes by way of Switzerland, and I am making my way to Paris through Belgium."

Père Pernet reached Paris in March. Alas! the terrible troubles in which France was plunged were not over. The revolution which had put the Commune in power, had brought with it a religious persecution as well as civil war. Priests were denounced, and Père Pernet, like all others, had to wear a secular dress.

The Little Sisters had just given up the ambulances outside the convent, but no sooner had the last soldier left Grenelle than the fratricidal warfare commenced which brought them fresh victims. Notwithstanding all that they had gone through in the trials and sufferings of the siege, they resumed their labours and continued them till the end. Thus many hundreds of wounded had again recourse to Grenelle to be nursed and fed.

The founder did his best to encourage the community in their work of charity, but anxiety on his account increased daily; nor was it without cause.

One day he was crossing the Champ de Mars on his way to Grenelle when a wretched youth began to shriek after him, pointing him out to the bystanders, "That is a *calotin*, a priest," at the same time making signs to attract a group of insurgents who stood in front of the École Militaire to the spot. These, to the number of five or six, surrounded the Father, who calmly accosted his accuser: "I am a Curé. And how do you know it?"

"I know you well," said the shameless boy. "I have been to confession to you. I tell you," he continued,

addressing the spectators, "he is a priest, and he will be the sixth I have denounced to-day and caused to be arrested."

Meanwhile the soldiers were leading the Father away. He was taken into the barracks and cross-examined.

"Is it true that you are a priest?" he was asked.

"I am not only a priest but a religious," was his answer.

"Good. You will have to sleep on bare boards and you will see."

"Oh, that won't trouble me much! For fifteen years I have been in the habit of doing so."

This answer took his interlocutors somewhat by surprise, and one of them said to him:

"*Citoyen*, you don't seem a bad fellow, but I can't bear priests."

They then took him through dark passages, up and down stairs without saying what they were going to do with him, and he was again examined and a number of questions put to him; to all these he answered, "I am a priest and a religious. And you may be sure of one thing, which is that I wish you no evil. I have an ambulance in Rue Violet, Grenelle, for your wounded. I have even founded a nursing society for your workmen—for those who cannot afford to pay for a nurse. I am, I may say, one of yourselves."

The order was given that he should be taken to the police commissioner. On his way he passed through the Rue de Commerce, and addressing himself to his captors, he pointed to a house belonging to an officer of the National Guard, who was under an obligation to him, and said: "If you wish to know more about me, take me to him."

They agreed, and trusting to the officer to see that the order was carried out, they left him there.

At the guard-room a passport was given him to which the condition was attached that he would have to report himself daily, so as to have it viséd.

Great was the shock to the Little Sisters when, after having awaited him anxiously all day, he arrived under the escort of two soldiers. As for Père Pernet, he never ceased regretting that he had not the happiness of shedding his blood for the honour of being a priest and a religious. But this was not in God's designs. The mission confided to him was not fully accomplished; it was sketched but not completed, and he was destined to bring it to its full perfection and development.

Mother Marie de Jésus, fearing that he would be again arrested, advised him to leave Paris. She had difficulty in persuading him, but his Superior, coming to the rescue, expressed a wish that he should join the Congregation at Arras to help Père Halluin in his orphanage. Just as he was starting and the train was already in motion, he discovered that his breviary was in the hands of a relation who had come to see him off. Instantly, regardless of consequences, he rushed to the door and called out: "Anais! my breviary."

He captured the precious volume, but left Anais overcome with dismay at the good Father's imprudence.

He was absent from Paris for three months. Whilst at Arras, he addressed the following letter to Grenelle:

"I arrived safely, without misfortune but not without pain. Our Lord does not seem to want to make use of me, since I am not able to come to your assistance when you are most in need of me."

Later on he writes, "I try and drown my anxieties

in work; my days are fully occupied. Tell me if you have suffered lately from the troops or the shelling. I hear the bombardment is getting more furious than ever. Poor children!"

On May 8 a letter from Grenelle came to comfort him. It was from Mother Marie de Jésus, and it gave him information of all that was happening to their work, besides reassuring him on the subject of her own dispositions and that of her daughters.

"After all," she writes, "if we are chosen and destined by Providence to endure the trials of extreme poverty to the extent of being exposed to the danger of dying of hunger, or having to be turned out of the house from the impossibility of fulfilling our engagements, what does suffering, even death itself, matter, as long as we remain lovingly attached to the adorable will of God and that he gives us the grace to remain faithful to him to the end?"

On May 16 she writes as follows about the wounded under their care:

"One day when I was busy serving them, I asked them if they were satisfied. 'I should think so, *ma Mère*,' answered the elder of the two I was addressing. 'How can you doubt it? . . . These ladies take the greatest care of us, it would be the height of ingratitude if we did not recognise it.' . . . I must tell you that in spite of our poverty, or rather on account of it, I have just offered hospitality to three young girls. . . . Shells occasionally pass over our heads, but, luckily, so far they have passed on. To-day, particularly, a shell came with an appallingly shrill sound just above us as we were all assembled in the garden, but it went on and burst on the boulevard of Grenelle. The sound of cannon and

the firing of muskets never ceases day or night. It is heart-rending when one thinks of the numbers of victims caused by these furious engagements of which no one is able to foresee the outcome. . . . For the first time, however, I am beginning to hope that the end is not far distant. I feel confident that our Lady will obtain this grace for us before the end of her month."

Père Pernet, referring to the massacres perpetrated by the Commune in those days of prolonged agony, writes (May 29):

"What horrors! What bloodshedding! The Archbishop and sixty-four priests executed at Mazas, and many more elsewhere. . . . Let us hope that these deaths which must be so meritorious will avert the wrath of God and dispose the divine Heart of our Lord—ever full of mercy and love—to give us peace and a regenerated France, and that it may become really Christian and worthy of the name of the eldest daughter of the Church."

Mother Marie de Jésus had not been mistaken. Peace came at the end of the month of May. The Little Sisters took up their normal way of life once more and returned to their work of nursing the poor in their homes.

CHAPTER IX

Habituons-nous à regarder toutes choses, grandes et petites, comme venant de la main de Dieu pour nous.—ST FRANÇOIS DE SALES.

THE work soon began to develop further. The epidemic of smallpox which had broken out during the war had not ceased. It gave opportunities to the Sisters to devote themselves to the families of those suffering from the scourge and to do an immensity of good among them. The community was increasing by fresh and promising vocations, so that it became possible to respond to the pressing invitations of zealous parish priests to make foundations in the populous workmen's quarters in the suburbs of Paris. The *succursales* of Batignolles, St Roch and Levallois-Perret were founded about this time.

But if the number of nuns increased, their poverty did not decrease. It made itself felt as much as it did in the early days; thus it was frequently impossible to give the Sisters who were sent to the new foundations the absolute necessities of life. One of the Superiors of a new foundation came at the beginning of a severe winter to see Mother Marie de Jésus, and she, full of solicitude as ever for her daughters, asked if they were wanting in anything.

"Mother," answered the Superior, "it is beginning to be very cold at night and our Sisters have no blankets."

Mother Marie, touched by these words, instantly replied:

"I have none not in use, but I know my daughters, and I can answer for it that they would dispute the honour

of stripping themselves in order to give their Sisters what they need. Let us go to the dormitory, and there shut our eyes and take the first ones that come."

The Superior tried her best to object, but she was not listened to, and had to accept the blankets.

She had hardly left the convent when the bell was rung and a benefactor was announced who came to say that she was sending them six coverlets.

There were numerous instances of a similar nature. Our Lord was pleased to manifest his love for a work whose whole history was a daily miracle of divine Providence. We can read in the annual report of the Congregation touching details about the results obtained by the mission of the Little Sisters at this time.

The following little episode appeared in a publication entitled *Sunday Talks*. The article was headed "The Little Sister of the Assumption," and it describes her apostolate in the working man's home.

Misery reigned supreme in the garret. A poor consumptive woman lay in a truckle-bed. Two sickly looking girls of six and eight years of age—their features pallid from privation—leant against it.

The sick woman's bed had never been made nor the bed-clothes touched for an age. The room was in a state of dirt impossible to describe. Sister Flavie of the "Little Sisters of the Assumption" enters it.

"I have been told by the neighbours," she says, "that you are ill and have nobody to nurse you, and I have come to see if I can be of use to you."

"But, Sister," answered the poor woman, "I am not rich—and then we are not church-goers."

"I have nothing to do with that—whether you go to

church or not. I have simply come to be a comfort to you. Let me do as I like, and if you are not pleased you have only to send me away."

The Sister then set to work. She put the bed to rights, petted the children, washed their faces, brushed and disentangled their hair. Then came the turn of the room: the floor was swept, the furniture dusted in next to no time. While she was doing this, Sister Flavie talked away—making friends with the children and consoling the mother. At last the poor sick woman feebly expostulated:

"But, Sister, you are not going to remain; you must be pressed for time."

"No, I have plenty of time and I have got your cooking to do."

"The fact is . . ." the woman hesitated.

"The fact is . . .?" repeated Sister Flavie.

"What will my husband say when he comes back? He does not like nuns."

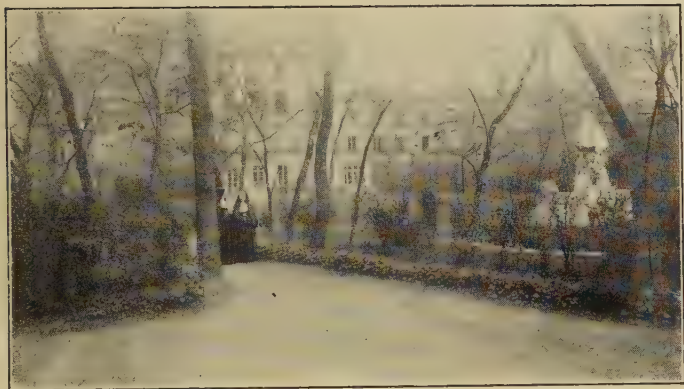
"But he dislikes nuns because he does not know them."

"I beg of you, for this evening at least, that you go away early so that I may warn him."

"Wait a bit," answered Sister Flavie; "if he returns before I am gone believe me you have nothing to fear."

Sister Flavie then proceeded to peel the potatoes, and with some tickets from the public kitchen, which she ran and fetched, she produced soup and even some little *friandises*—which came nobody knows how, or whence—and finally she produced a meal which the little girls eyed with envy.

The table was prepared; a clean napkin found in the cupboard was made to serve as table-cloth; clean glasses,



THE MOTHER HOUSE : THE GARDEN AND STATUE OF PÈRE PERNET.



THE MOTHER HOUSE :
THE CHAPEL.



MOTHER MARY OF THE BLESSED
SACRAMENT, SECOND SUPERIOR-
GENERAL (DIED JUNE 15, 1922).

and plates not too badly chipped, gave it quite a festive air.

Sister Flavie then knelt by the sick woman's bed and made the children kneel beside her, and having made a sign of the cross on their foreheads, said:

“Now we are going to pray for your mother.”

She said an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and made an act of contrition. The poor woman stared at her with large uncomprehending eyes: she did not join in the prayers, for alas, she had forgotten them! She joined her hands, however, and made a sketchy sign of the cross. Sister Flavie concluded her operations, bade her an affectionate good-night, kissed the little girls—whose affection she had gained—and departed, saying she would return presently.

Michel got back in due course from his day's work. His surprise was great when he cast his eyes around him.

The bed of the invalid was tidied up, the children were clean and had a happy appearance which was new to them; in the middle of the little room there was a supper prepared on a clean table-cloth such as he had hardly ever seen before. He sat down to his meal and found the food excellent, very different from what it was generally.

“But who then is the neighbour who has done all these fine things?” he asked. “People do not often give themselves trouble for poor work-people like ourselves.”

“It was not a neighbour,” the woman answered.

“Who was it, then?”

“It was the Sister,” cried the children.

Michel's face clouded over.

“What Sister? By the by, I noticed one going away when I came upstairs. But Sisters don't cook, Sisters

don't go to people like ourselves. Who asked her to come? Besides, I won't have Sisters coming here. This house is not a convent. Nuns are the enemies of the people."

"Don't be angry, Michel," said the poor sick woman. "No one went to fetch her. Some of the neighbours said I was laid up, and she came and without making any fuss about it she made my bed and brushed the children's hair and cooked the supper. Then, when she found there was nothing more to do, she went away. I can assure you she was most kind."

"But I won't have it, I tell you. I won't give my money to such persons."

"She does not want money. She explained thoroughly to me that her Rule forbids her to take money."

"That's queer," said Michel, who could not make head or tail out of it.

Sister Flavie returned the next morning to her work of self-devotion. She recommenced her care of the sick woman and the children; the latter were beginning to love her like a mother, and the former began to confide her troubles to her. God knows what trials had befallen the little household during the previous days and months! First there was a strike, then came her illness, and Michel took to frequenting the public-house. All this was followed by want and then by misery. Besides, Michel was not easy to manage at times.

They were still talking when Michel entered.

"Good-day, Ma'am," he said in rather an off-hand tone of voice. But Sister Flavie was not going to allow herself to be disconcerted by such a trifle. She soon put Michel at his ease, talked of the poor invalid, of his work, of the little girls, etc.

Michel listened, wholly taken aback. He had never before come across nuns at such close quarters. He could never have thought it possible that a Sister could be like that. He thought to himself: If Gourju saw me in conversation with a nun, I wonder what he would say? Yet it is not what I thought. I never imagined it would be like this. How Gourju would chaff me! All the same, if he had a sick wife, he would be glad to see her properly nursed.

All this time Sister Flavie was flitting round the table preparing his supper. It consisted of a savoury omelette and cauliflower *au gratin*, his favourite dishes. How good they were! His poor wife had never succeeded so well even before she was taken ill.

Michel was quite taken aback and did not know what to think of it.

The time for Sister Flavie's departure came. Without any fuss, she knelt at the foot of the bed, taking the little girls to each side of her. They said the Our Father, Hail Mary and act of contrition. Michel stood in a manner transfixed. He had never said a prayer since he made his First Communion. Free-thinker, reader of the *Anti-clérical*—he was all this—yet he could not resist the impression made upon him; his heart was moved.

When Sister Flavie took leave, saying good-bye and *au revoir* to everyone, Michel answered: "Good-bye, Sister." It was no longer Ma'am.

"That Sister must have had great disappointments in life," he said after she had gone, "to devote herself as she does to poor people."

"We can easily find out," answered his wife. "She does not mind what we say to her."

The next morning the poor woman repeated Michel's remark; it is one constantly made, as the ordinary explanation for people giving up the world is that it has treated them badly.

The Sister laughed on being asked the question. She was still young, attractive, and had no appearance of being one of those upon whom the world has frowned.

"You were perhaps rich when you were in the world, Sister?"

"I am very much richer now," she answered gaily. "Those who have given up all for God's sake receive a hundredfold in this world and as much more in the next."

Sister Flavie did not say what was her family name, but it was easy to see from her charming manners that she had occupied a good position in the world and that she had known its pleasures.

"Look at me," she said to the mother. "Do I look like a disappointed person? When one has given oneself to God and one's conscience is at peace, one is always full of joy."

A few more days and Michel was no longer the same man. What he had seen going on in his own home had transformed him. What a difference between this friendly Sister, with her simple, kindly manner, and the monsters depicted by the socialist papers!

The Paris workman is no fool, and he has a heart.

"If religion is at the bottom of all this, religion is not what I thought it was," he said to himself.

The Sister had had talks with him. She did not bore him with long discourses; what she said was simple and easily understood.

A few weeks later a touching ceremony was to be seen

in one of the chapels attached to a convent of the Little Sisters in Paris. The sick woman, with restored health, came to Communion in thanksgiving for her recovery at a Mass said for that intention. She had reason to thank God for other graces. Michel no longer drank; he brought his wages to her for the support of the family, so that they were all living in comparative ease. And Michel, who had had a horror of confession, had spoken to a priest.

“So that was all,” he said afterwards. “How good God is! If you only knew how happy I feel!”

Michel’s history was one that was repeated day after day. During the first few years of the foundation of the Congregation, it was fitting that the work should be a hidden one.

As Père Pernet was wont to say, the Little Sister should trace her furrow in humility. Even their dress had nothing remarkable about it except its simplicity. It was semi-religious and semi-secular, and consisted of a cap of black muslin and black skirt and cape; a rosary at the side completed the costume. But there was one thing which marked out the Little Sister in her primitive garb from the first: and that was a crucifix worn in the belt. This was to be a reminder of the combat before her, and to be an emblem expressive of her mission, which was one of valiant opposition to the spirit of the world by means of the weapon of charity. The time had now come to determine the form of the habit definitely, and to obtain the canonical authorisation from the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris of the work which had been for ten years carried on under his eyes and which had been conducive of so much good.

Opinions were divided on the subject of the dress. Many people—and amongst them some of the best friends of the Congregation—strongly urged on the founder the advantages of a more or less secular dress. Their plea was that the Little Sisters would find it easier to make their way amongst the labouring class, and accordingly to be able to do more good, by dressing like the rest of the world. Even Mother Marie de Jésus, from motives of humility, was in favour of a modification of the religious habit.

The Father listened to what everyone had to say, but he did not deviate from his settled opinion.

“ I cannot picture the Little Sister to myself,” he said, “ otherwise than in a religious habit.”

Experience proves that, far from being an inconvenience, it is rather an advantage for the nun to present herself to the man of the people (unbeliever though he may be) clothed in a consecrated dress. It is a constant reminder of the life apart led by the religious, besides being her own strongest safeguard. Never will the working man take fright at it. A woman’s self-sacrifice will strike him in a more vivid light under the veil or *cornette* than when he sees or hears of it behind the severe isolation of the grille. He soon becomes proud of the nun’s dress, salutes it willingly, and he may be heard to say: “ We have got Sisters of our own now.”

In addition to this, Père Pernet was moved by the spirit of the Assumption in the matter of dress which was in accordance with that of the grand old traditions of the monastic Orders.

Accordingly the habit settled upon for the Little Sisters to wear was such as we see it to-day. It is plain and adapted to the work they have to perform. The

girdle of St Augustine which they are authorised by the Holy See to wear joins them in a union of merits and prayers with the Augustinian Order. It also recalls that great patriarch to their mind whose Rule they follow.

These were the first words Mother Marie de Jésus heard when she presented herself to Archbishop's House—they came from the lips of the Abbé Caron, H.E. Cardinal Guibert's Vicar-General—"People do not talk much about you, but we are not unaware of the ardour with which you carry on your work of mercy. It is a great proof that a work comes from God when it remains in obscurity as yours has done. Yes, the spirit of God has animated those who are at the head of it, and our Lord will be sure to bless it."

The beneficent and paternal reception which the Congregation met with from the wise and prudent Cardinal and his venerated coadjutor Mgr. Richard, with whom the founders treated on all matters concerning the new religious family and its development, was a precious source of encouragement to them.

After Mgr. Richard became archbishop, he lost no opportunity of showing his devotion to the interests of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and at the same time of his deep affection for the Father.

Cardinal Guibert after having examined the constitutions found them well adapted to the work which the Congregation had in view and gave them his approbation.

His Eminence delegated the Abbé Caron to pronounce the formal institution of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in his name on the Feast of

the Visitation, 1875; Abbé Guibert gave the religious habit to the Sisters and received their canonical vows. The date was well chosen for the ceremony. It was a reminder to the Little Sister that her work in the world was no other than that of our Lady, who, bearing her Saviour within her, went with haste to give her services in the house of Elizabeth and Joachim where the presence of him who reposed in her womb sanctified John, the Precursor of the Messiah. Does not the very name of this great mystery recall also the holy founder of the Visitation, and may we not be allowed to think that St Francis de Sales smiled from the heights of heaven on this newly founded work? For, following upon many others, it sought to realise in a special manner one of his most ardent desires—namely, the evangelisation of the working classes by the exercise of charity.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption, authorised and encouraged by the Church in the person of the chief pastor of the diocese, could now advance without fear in the path marked out for them, taking for their inspiration their beautiful motto, “Thy kingdom come,” and for their aim that of making the name of Jesus known and loved.

It was about this time that Père Pernet received an encouragement which, though slight in itself, had its value in his eyes; Mlle. Clotilde Molozoe, who bore the name in religion of Sister Marie Philomène, applied to be received at Grenelle. She at the same time confided to the Father that for many years she had been prevented by family ties from becoming a nun, in spite of her strong attraction to the religious life. She also told him that she had made a pilgrimage to Ars to ask the holy Curé to intercede for her mother’s recovery,

who was then very ill, and that she had taken the opportunity of consulting him about her own religious vocation and of telling him of the trial she was undergoing.

“My child,” answered the saint, “console yourself. You will be a nun, but in a Congregation which does not at present exist.”

This happened in 1850, the year the Curé of Ars died, and the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption only came into existence in 1864. The thought, accordingly, that the work had been foreseen by one who like St Jean Baptiste Vianney bore such striking marks of sanctity, gave the founder a fresh assurance that the work was blessed by God and willed by him.

Sister Marie Philomène entered the Congregation at the age of thirty-four, and, in spite of her extreme delicacy, she spent five happy years in the religious life. Père Pernet, speaking of her after her death, said: “Her soul was a virginal one, sincere and upright before God. It gave her a strength of mind which, in spite of great debility, rendered her capable of any and every sacrifice.” And truly her spirit of self-sacrifice was without limit.

The foundations of Belleville, Puteaux, Choisy-le-Roi were made successively in the diocese of Paris in addition to those which already existed; and at the invitation of the Bishop of Beauvais they started another at Creil.

The ever-increasing numbers of novices made it necessary to move the novitiate to Sèvres in the diocese of Versailles whilst the mother-house of Grenelle was being enlarged. Here, in this quiet retreat under the shadow of a humble sanctuary, the novices, who now numbered thirty-two, were being trained to a religious

life. Six professed nuns joined them in order to devote themselves to the care of the sick of Sèvres and the neighbourhood. They received a truly fatherly welcome from Mgr. Mabilie. It is unnecessary to say that this new foundation was a heavy tax on the resources of the Congregation; all the more so because it was in addition to the expenses of the new buildings at Grenelle where not only the house but the chapel were insufficient for the size of the community. Neither Père Pernet nor Mother Marie de Jésus doubted for a moment that our Lord while multiplying the birds from day to day would enlarge the nest to contain them. They had confidence, moreover, that he would at the same time provide for those who, for love of him, were working for and nursing his suffering members the poor, and were ever doing so for his sake alone, neither asking nor receiving a reward in return.

Still it cannot be denied that great anxiety was felt by those who had the responsibility of conducting the little family. Thus on one occasion the sum of 5,000 francs had to be produced at Sèvres before a certain date, and the funds of the community in spite of the procuratrix being robbed of the last penny, had nothing like that sum to meet its liabilities. Mother Marie de Jésus, however, having arranged to go and visit the novitiate, did not consider the critical state of the situation a sufficient reason to adjourn her departure. When taking leave of the Assistant—who replaced the Superior in her absence—she said to her:

“Make all our children pray. I am not anxious, but God will have to come to our assistance.”

The day advanced and still no sign appeared of divine intervention, when, at 5 o'clock, Père Chocarne, O.P.,

arrived and asked to see the Superior-General. The Portress answered that she was absent and her return was not expected for some days.

"Nevertheless it is most important," he said, "that I should see her."

"Shall I let the Assistant who replaces her know that you would like to speak to her?"

"Yes, tell the Assistant that I have important news to communicate."

Accordingly the Assistant was sent for.

"Mother," he began, "I have been commissioned by a person whose name I am forbidden to divulge, to make you this offering. She asks you to pray for her son's conversion."

At the same time he presented the Assistant with five bank notes, each of a thousand francs.

"Heaven has sent you, Father," she answered. "Our Mother told me before leaving that she had to pay that sum this very day."

Père Chocarne rejoiced, and gave thanks to God, that he had been the instrument he had made use of to bring this unexpected relief to the Little Sisters in their necessity.

When Mother Marie de Jésus was told of it, she said:

"I felt convinced that God would come to our assistance."

It required souls well trained in the science of the saints to be able to stand such trials unmoved. But Père Pernet had the gift of forming souls such as those. The following words were some that on one occasion he addressed to his children:

"My very dear daughters, our good God might, when choosing you, have sent you to one of those Congrega-

tions which have long been in existence and which have all the resources and developments which the course of years (and in some cases centuries) bring with them. You would have found convents which had 'the roof on the house,' in other words, where all was fixed and settled. But he has not so willed; he has made you come to a Congregation which has only just been started, to a house without a roof on it; without convenient accommodation, without having constitutions definitely approved of. But believe me this is no evil, much less is it a misfortune. There is great merit, and even joy, in facing difficulties, in bearing the trials of early days; it is a privilege to have a share in starting a work for God.

"You are all founders, since you belong to the first generation of your religious family, and much glory is attached to that fact. For who are they who deserve the *croix d'honneur*? Is it not those who mount the breach, who lead the attack? Well, my children, you have scaled the walls, you have led the attack and you will earn the cross of victory. Our Lord will award it to you and our Lady will give it to you when you reach paradise.

"I admit that it requires courage, but if you respond to God's designs who has destined you to be foundation stones, he will never cease to bestow those choice blessings on you which he gives at the beginning of a work and which he ceases to give later on. The wise men of the world and the pusillanimous reason very differently; they will try many times to turn you back from the path on which you have entered; but let them say as they please, and do you make progress in fervour, generosity and the acquisition of virtue."

Whilst the holy founder stimulated his daughters' courage by his supernatural example and words, he neglected no means of sustaining their religious life. He made it a rule from the time that the novitiate was started at Sèvres that one day and night should be spent every week in watching before the Blessed Sacrament. The novices began this holy practice at the foot of the tabernacle, but, when the chapel was built, he asked for the favour of being allowed to have Exposition during that time. The permission was granted to him not only for Sèvres but also for the mother-house in Paris. This twenty-four hours' adoration, instituted with the object of obtaining spiritual fruit from the Sisters' apostolate amongst the poor whom they nursed, was continued from that time amongst all the houses wherever the number of nuns made it possible.

There were other graces and blessings which came by degrees to give joy to the founders and to assure the spiritual welfare of the young Congregation. The Little Sisters, who up to that time had only made temporary vows renewed each year, received in the year 1878 the authorisation to make perpetual vows.

The founder, after having presided at the solemn profession of Mother Marie de Jésus and of her two first daughters, Sister Marie de la Croix and Sister Marie Josèphe, and received their vows, spoke as follows to the Sisters:

"The moment has come, dear Mother, the moment which the divine Master has foreseen from all eternity, which will bind you to him for ever. . . . It is a memorable event for us all—an unspeakable joy.

"You have many times given yourself to God; many a time you have made an act of self-abandonment to him

of a more or less solemn nature; but to-day you open a new road to your daughters; you start that series of holy engagements which once made are irrevocable, and whose value we shall never fully appreciate on this side of heaven. The fourteen years of labour, of holy and trying self-devotion, years of patient solicitude have received their crowning reward to-day. With little self-esteem, and little esteemed by the world, you have leant on God only, and he who loves the humble and little ones has blessed your work and caused your undertaking to bear fruit.

“Like Mary at the foot of the Cross, you have travailed in anguish. But already you rejoice at ‘the labour of your hands.’ Your house has been blessed; you have seen the good things of Jerusalem. Your inner life is as a fruitful vine, your children are as ‘olive plants round about your table.’

“You are this day like a leader, crowned on the field of battle. But you must hold your ground; you must ever cry, ‘Forward, forward.’ Your children will rally around you, they will never refuse to march. You will trace the path, shouldering the Cross, inspiring them with generosity, with heroism even. You have now two helpers beside you, both of whom have been a support to you. Yes, my daughters! you are the first fruits of the work. Our Lord has chosen you in order that you may be a help to your Mother. He admits you to the privilege of pronouncing your perpetual vows. You know who it is who awaits you. Proceed, then, without fear, and may the gift of yourselves be such as it should be.”

The graces given to the foundress in making her perpetual vows could not but have the effect of strength-

ening her supernatural life, and she required them all. More than ever was she to realise the truth of some words which she had used in writing to Père Pernet a short time previously:

“If I had reason to believe that my health was becoming worse, I should not be afraid or be discouraged by it, as I am beginning to be convinced that the last few years of my life will be passed in an uninterrupted series of mental or physical suffering. . . . These thoughts fill me with joy and hope, for I have an ardent desire to suffer, though by a curious apparent contradiction I fear it greatly. I desire and apprehend suffering: I love it and hate it. I love it because I look upon it as a means of expiation and as a sign of predestination. I hate it because I am afraid of being cowardly, of being wanting in courage, and thus that it should be to me a cause of reprobation. Presumption prompts me to say: ‘Again, again, O Lord;’ pusillanimity bids me cry: ‘Enough, O my God. Never shall I have the courage to endure more.’”

The Father makes this answer to the appeal:

“Remain calm in the dispositions in which the Spirit of our Saviour and his love for you place you. Be prepared for any event, ask only of him the grace of corresponding with his action and following the movements of his Will. Do not ask for crosses nor refuse them, establish yourself in a holy and complete indifference.”

He said to her on one occasion in allusion to her bad health:

“Let us remind ourselves when we find the need of taking heart and raising our courage that it is not the great geniuses nor the mighty Herculesees who perform God’s works, but the saints. In choosing us—you and

me—our Lord is simply carrying out his usual plan of action. He has chosen the most feeble instruments to work great results so that all the glory should be his.”

Mgr. Lamarche, Bishop of Quimper, was parish priest of Grenelle at the time when the great graces received by the Congregation had been purchased at the price of great trials and heavy crosses, and, recalling the early days of the Little Sisters to their memory, he said, referring to their holy foundress:

“What a soul was hers! What an admirable soul! I have never since I assumed the care of souls come across a woman endowed with more gifts. Her calmness and the way she possessed her soul in the midst of the greatest trials was truly marvellous. She was never agitated; one felt she left herself entirely in God’s hands. And how sure was her judgement! Knowledge and tact such as she possessed are rarely to be found in man or woman. I cannot tell you what good she did me; the sight of her alone strengthened me, and I used to say to myself when encountering the hundred and one trials which a priest comes across and feeling troubled by them, ‘What! you are upset by these things and here is a woman who goes about calm and unmoved, *who knows how to suffer.*’ She was a continual reminder to me, and I have never forgotten her; nor shall I ever find her equal again.”

Père d’Alzon on many different occasions manifested his joy at the development of the work and his admiration of those to whom God had intrusted it.

When speaking to the students at his college at Nîmes on his return from Paris in 1867, where he had been visiting the great Exhibition which was held that year, he said (alluding to Mother Marie de Jésus):

"I saw very beautiful objects there, but I rank one above all of them, which surpasses in splendour the palaces of kings. I saw a little woman who has begun a great work, and the little woman herself is very great."

Later on, writing to Père Pernet, he says: "You do not mention your daughters, which is too bad. I send you a barrel of wine for their use and comfort." Then he ends by saying, "I bless you and all the *Pernettes* present and future."

Every time that he spent a little while in Paris, he never failed to go to Grenelle and bless and encourage those who loved to call him their "venerated grandfather."

The novitiate at Sèvres used also to receive visits from him, and there, surrounded by the white veils of the novices, he would rejoice at seeing this little branch of his great Assumptionist family prospering so greatly. A few short lines addressed to Père Pernet on Christmas Day, 1877, expressed touchingly the feelings of tenderness and admiration he had for them and their work. He says:

"Your daughters have written to me, and before long I shall answer their letter. But please thank them by anticipation for their good wishes for a happy Feast and wish them a happy New Year from me. When my time has come to take my departure to eternity, if I am long ill, I shall hide myself in a garret in order to get myself nursed by a Little Sister. Meanwhile be as little ill as you can and take as much care as is possible of yourself for the good of your Father and your daughters."

Three years later, on the feast of the Presentation of our Lady, 1880, the patriarch of the Assumptionist

family was called to receive the reward of his eminent services to God and the Church. A true soldier of Christ, vigorous to the last, Père d'Alzon was in full possession of his senses when death overtook him. His hand was raised to bless his sons even at the supreme moment, and we cannot doubt that the Little Sisters of the Assumption and Père Pernet, who was ever so faithful a son to him, came in for a share of that last blessing.

Père Pernet, many years after Père d'Alzon's death, having heard of a marvellous cure obtained through his intercession, alluded to it in these words when addressing his daughters at Grenelle:

"My children, as the root of Jesse produced Jesus Christ, so will his glory come from our patriarch Père d'Alzon and his works, for his roots were deeply founded in him. Yes, he is the Jesse of the great family of the Assumption, and from this vigorous trunk branches ever-green and ever-vigorous will sprout forth.

"May his spirit, with which I have tried to penetrate myself, and which I have done all in my power to communicate to you, be always living in us. His love for our Saviour and for souls was boundless. And what words could describe his tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin! And how great was his love for Holy Church, and his submission not only to the decrees of the supreme Pontiff, but even to his smallest wishes. If this spirit lives in you and directs your actions, you will be true grandchildren of Père d'Alzon—as I hope to be his son *in aeternum*."

The Little Sisters found the same support, devotion and tender affection of Père d'Alzon in his successor Père Picard, who, from the very first start of the Con-

gregation, when he was Superior at the Rue François I^{er}, gave them tokens of an unvarying sympathy and encouragement.

CHAPTER X

The creation is not finished. "My Father," says the divine Master, "works even now." Since God is busy with his task shall I be idle?—ARCHBISHOP SPALDING.

THE details into which we have had to enter may perhaps have had the effect, if not of causing the plan of the founder to be lost sight of, still of obscuring to a certain extent the practical realisation and object of his programme.

As we have already said, his great aim was the regeneration, in a Christian sense, and sanctification of the poor and the working man's family.

The Abbé Landrieux, Vicar-General of Rheims (afterwards Bishop of Dijon), in a sermon he preached at a clothing at Grenelle, places this special mission of the Little Sisters in a striking light.

"The poor man is twice afflicted; besides his visible, pitiable want which makes a pariah of him in the sight of the world, he has a still greater indigence of soul which closes heaven to him. For the world's greatest crime towards the poverty-stricken, greater than all others, is the moral destitution in which it allows him to grovel.

"You whom I am addressing, you have realised that charity to the poor does not consist in material assistance alone, but in a frank and cordial compassion which is full of consideration for their feelings. Of them it may be said (and of them perhaps more than of any others):

‘Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.’ The poor man is greedy of a word of sympathy, of a mark of affection. He has often the gift of intelligence; he has a heart, a soul. And yet people are too easily inclined to think that when he has enough to eat, he wants nothing more. Christ brought a divine gift to the world; the poor man asks for it and he is never given it. Pity is sometimes given him, but kindness, love, never. *You* have realised that you must carry your work for the poor to those lengths; that it is not sufficient to bind up his wounds, to take him into a shelter, to pay him a passing visit, but that you must gain his confidence by kindness and sympathy and raise him from his fallen state by bringing him nearer to God. It is Providence who has led you to join the ranks of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, for I doubt if there is a Congregation which is better organised or more adapted to the wants of our century than this one. The sick are but a pretext for the Little Sister. Her object is to reinstate God in the working man’s family. She is not satisfied with putting in an appearance in a garret in the home of the poor. She installs herself there in the guise of a servant, and by the exercise of patience, humility, by dint of zeal and self-devotion, she ends by bringing Jesus Christ with her. Conversions, abjurations, the regularisation of the marriage tie, deferred First Communions, the baptism of adults—these are the fruits of the Little Sister’s work. She goes into homes where a priest cannot penetrate. She greets with her gentle smile those whose lives defy human conventions, the outlawed, the ne’er-do-weels, the unbelievers; all those unfortunate individuals whose hatred, exasperated by wrongs, tends

to become a danger to society; and the gentleness of the lamb contrives in almost all cases to vanquish the fury of the wolf. Besides this the Little Sister is tenacious; she does not lose hold of her conquests. She persuades the different members of the working man's family to enter into different associations which are the ramifications of the Institute. Thus, wherever a settlement of the Little Sisters is started in one of those populous cities where the greater part of the population are ignorant and perverted, ripe for anarchy, who have lost God and acknowledge no master, an unassuming propaganda is begun in behalf of Christianity which grows day by day, and which in the future will make for a regenerating element in the social order.

"Go then, my dear daughters, go with confidence to prepare in the solitude and discipline of the novitiate for this apostolic life. Go to prepare yourself by prayer and recollection for a quasi-sacerdotal ministry. For the Gospel attests that poverty is a kind of sacrament; an outward sign under which—as in the Holy Eucharist—Christ himself lies hidden, for he said: 'Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'"

The founder never ceased from exciting an apostolic zeal in the hearts of his daughters.

"You should be apostles," he said to them, "a Little Sister who was not an apostle would no longer be a Little Sister. An apostle is one who throws himself into the thick of the fight in order to extend his Master's kingdom. He speeds upon his errand, making a great sign of the cross, and offering God the sacrifice of his life. You should do this in the morning at the foot of the altar before starting on your mission, saying: 'Lord,

I have given you my life.' . . . We should be in the frame of mind of being ready to mount the scaffold or descend into a furnace so as to prove our love. If you are not all this, you will be but poor Little Sisters. I pray daily to your Saviour to make you see the exceptional beauty of our mission. Heroism should reign habitually in your hearts, so that you would be ready to dare any risk or danger in order to save a soul. . . . Your life requires not only personal virtues for the edification of your community, but Catholic, *i.e.* universal virtues; a burning zeal fruitful in self-immolation, devotedness and self-sacrifice to the extent that all you possess of powers, health, life, graces should be employed unreservedly in the service of your neighbour. After working for your own sanctification for two or three years, our Lord sends you as a ray of sunshine into wretched hovels where daylight barely penetrates, and where supernatural light is even more rare to find. In the same way as the rays of the sun purify and vivify so you will bring purification from sin, the vivification of grace to the homes of the poor and the unfortunate whom you nurse.

“Let the Little Sister give herself to the blind so that he may see; to the lame that he may walk; to those who have no faith that they may believe; to those who have bitterness and hatred in their hearts that they may love, and in short to all those who are in sin so that they may become good and holy. Thus it is that you will establish the kingdom of God, and you will bring salvation to those to whom you bring your devoted service. . . . Again, remember you have nothing to fear; obedience will be to you a cloister, a rampart, a source of strength to you in your mission. In obeying you will always be

doing God's will; you will be protected from the attacks and snares set by men and devils, and you will be acting in union with our Saviour for the salvation of many."

But the Little Sister of the Assumption was not to exercise her influence on the poor only; Père Pernet, we must not forget, had in view the bringing together of all classes. To carry out this plan, he proposed to the rich to work at this apostolate in concert with the Little Sister. Ladies of the world were found who agreed joyfully to associate themselves with the work, and to share the labour and devotion of the Sister at the bedside and at the homes of the poor. In 1876 an association was formed to which the name of the *Dames Servantes des Pauvres*¹ was given. Its members were grouped around the two founders; in the first place at the mother-house, and then round the Little Sisters at the various centres where a house of the work had been founded. Père Pernet, by the rule he gave these ladies, inculcated in them and united them in the duties of a deeply Christian life, as well as in the charitable exercises practised by the Little Sisters of the Assumption, whose sisters they thus, in a very real sense, became. The delicately brought-up woman of the world accordingly might be seen following the nun and working with her in the cabins of the poor; nor did she hesitate to assume the apron of the Little Sister and to tuck up her sleeves and, like her, become a servant of the poor—thus working at her own sanctification whilst bringing untold graces at the same time on her family. Have we not also seen the *Dame Servante* many times use the means at her disposal to lighten the sufferings that illness, hunger

¹ Lady Servants of the Poor.

and misery bring in their train. Not only have their influence and co-operation produced the happiest results with the working class, but also they have been able to supplement, financially, the efforts of the Little Sisters when these (owing to their poverty) had only their services and willing hearts to put at the disposition of their patients.

The work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption had been barely started in 1866 when Providence raised up for their assistance the grand and noble figure of the Baronne de Bastard, who was to be a model and type to the future *Dame Servante*, and whom God has since taken to himself. At the very time when Sister Marie Denise (who was the first called to be a protector to the work in heaven) was nursing a poor woman covered with ulcers and running sores, Mme. de Bastard rivalled the Sister in her care and attention to the poor sufferer. Sister Marie Denise had to hasten her steps in the early morning or she found herself anticipated in the office of nurse by one who rejoiced in exercising the functions of a *Servante des Pauvres* even before the Association afterwards known by that name had come into existence. Amongst the number who have since by their generous assistance and concurrence carried on the work, prominence must be given to the Duchess FitzJames, the indefatigable provider of the wants of the Little Sisters, of Mme. Justine Lemaître who served so often as a veritable intermediary of Providence, of the Demarchy family, the Marquise de Talhauet, Mme. Blount, the Baronne Renée Reille and many more. To these names others could be added, but as we have them still with us, to them we proffer our wishes for a long life.

The means to consolidate the work of Christian regeneration begun in the bed of sickness has now to be considered. The working man after the Little Sister's departure is left without moral support, and exposed to suffer the loss of faith amid the society of his comrades, who turn it into ridicule. Hence there were grave risks of falls, if not of fresh apostasy. The moment had come for the founder to carry out the remaining part of his scheme; one of which he had foreseen the need from the beginning.

In the year 1881, accordingly, he inaugurated the "Fraternity of our Lady of Salvation." Later on, when it was established in London, the Little Sisters who were working there drew his attention to the inconvenience of the name in view of the Protestant Salvation Army. He therefore associated still further this fraternity to his own religious family by putting it under the patronage of our Lady of the Assumption. By the medium of the Little Sister, he grouped together heads of families who, under the guidance of the priest, were willing to give their time to the noble work of regenerating their fellow-men. . . . These men of the world belonging to the higher classes—to whom Père Pernet gave the name of decurions—were, according to the intention of their founder, to put themselves at the service of their brothers: that is, of members of the working class, also of the poor, the necessitous; and to help them by their advice, their influence and their good example. It is thus that Christian charity should bring together and closely unite the different classes of society which irreligion and the spirit of revolt tend to divide and maintain in a continual state of hatred and antagonism.

We may be allowed to mention the following names of

men occupying high positions in various walks of life, all of whom have gone to receive their eternal reward, as models and types of what has been done and may still be done by this work of fraternal charity. Such were Colonel Tiersonnier, the Baron René Reille and his son André, General de Sonis, M. Saulnier, M. Normand, Comte d'Agoult, M. Maurice Aubry, M. Lucien La Fonta, M. Ernest Ollivier, M. Boyer de Bouillane, Admiral Mathieu, M. Delepouve, Comte de Courson, etc.

Père Pernet, after giving a year to test the success of the work, fixed its statutes. When giving a copy of them to a decurion, he said to him:

"I have found nothing to change in them; I feel that they do not come from me but from God: the idea of them came to me when I was kneeling at the foot of the altar after saying Mass."

These statutes invite the members to acquit themselves conscientiously of their duties as fathers of family and of Christian workers, to renounce firmly all that would be an obstacle to them and to exhibit themselves on all occasions faithful followers of our Lord, without heeding human respect, and sons of the Church, friends of truth and defenders of religion. M. Delepouve—himself a decurion—when speaking at a General Meeting of the Society which was held under the presidency of H.E. Cardinal Richard, spoke as follows of the Fraternity of our Lady of the Assumption:

"Père Pernet rested his argument on the incontestable fact that according to nature all men are brothers. Humanity is one large family, but a family disfigured and divided by sin. Nature inclines man to love his neighbour, but his passions, his vices urge him to indulge in an ill-regulated self-love leading to the

hatred of his neighbour. From this source flow all the pains and penalties which afflict humanity.

“Christ’s work in society consists in establishing peace in him and by him, and fraternal charity amongst men. This is the true fraternity which has inspired and caused such miracles of charity, of sacrifice and self-devotion in the world; the fraternity which has created virtues which the world knows not; a sanctity whose sublimity astounds and dazzles it—and even frightens it; the one, in short, which St Paul defines in the words: ‘We being many are one body in Christ; and every one members one of another.’ All fraternity which repudiates Jesus Christ and his love is to be feared, and moreover *it is sterile*. Founded on chimeras or on interest, passion or emotion—that is, on ill-regulated self-love—it does but bring men together in order to divide and ultimately to destroy them.

“Père Pernet’s hope, and the end he aimed at, was to oppose a Christian fraternity to the false fraternities. Now a Christian fraternity makes no change in the world’s outward affairs; it leads to no political or social revolution, but it aims at a change of heart in men by uniting them in one supreme love which excludes all divisions, and which cannot fail to diffuse a peace and benefits on the world which no scientific system, no laws are capable of producing. It was on this basis that Père Pernet sought to build the Fraternity of our Lady of the Assumption. Accordingly he not only appealed to the working man, but to all ranks and conditions of men, whatever their position might be in society. The only stipulation he exacted was the Christian faith; the only counsel he gave was: ‘Know your fellow-men, go and seek them and let all love one another.’

“We have all sought to obey this wise direction, and it has led us to form many friendly and agreeable ties, and solid and honourable friendships. We are not united by any personal interest, but we study questions which are concerned with the moral development and well-being of the working class in concert with each other, in the spirit of fraternal charity. We combat the sophisms by which it is sought to urge men on to civil war, and we seek to throw light on the beauty and social influence of Christianity. Thus we work in union for the peace and prosperity of our country by means of these two forces which have made her greatness in the past, and which are the only source of hope for society in the future—namely, faith and charity. By so doing, we have practically demonstrated that a true equality amongst men can never result from violent and impious struggles, for hatred and revenge can never lead to justice and peace. These can only be the blessed fruit of a disinterested charity which alone will regenerate man—causing the rich to be without pride and the poor without envy.

“I am well aware that our work has been criticised; what enterprise escapes criticism? But its success has justified it, and it is said that nothing succeeds like success. It is growing from year to year and spreading in all parts of France; we have even crossed the Channel and have established the work in England and Ireland. Wherever the Little Sisters go, we follow them. Great was our founder’s ambition, and it was equalled by that of the Little Sisters. They are athirst with longing to serve Christ and to spread torrents of love of him over the whole world. And we also partake of their ardour, and are ready to go wherever the Spirit of God calls

NOVITIATE OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF
THE ASSUMPTION.



THE NOVITIATE.



THE GARDEN.

them, so as to be faithful followers of Père Pernet, and to continue his work with the same traditions and under the same direction."

Every additional affiliation of brothers and decurions brought a fresh joy to the Father. He was accustomed to put a crucifix in the hands of the newly associated for them to kiss—a touching sign of their affiliation—whilst they said that they were desirous of living and dying as Christians, and that they undertook to be faithful to the brotherhood of our Lady of the Assumption.

This joy at the admission of new members was shared by the venerable Cardinal Richard. The Cardinal used to preside every year on Low Sunday at a General Meeting of the "Fraternity," after having given their Easter Communion to over five hundred workmen in the chapel of the *œuvres* at Grenelle—a chapel to which he gave on one occasion the name of his "little Notre Dame."

It was not sufficient, however, for Père Pernet to reach the family by its head, he wished also to take hold of it by its *heart* by attaching the Mother to the Little Sister. He responded to the desire of the wives of the members of the Fraternity by giving them a similar association; a simple and practical rule of life which was calculated to make not only good women of them but true Christians. He gave them St Monica for their patroness.

To sum up what has been said, it is easy to see how completely the founder had realised the idea with which God had inspired him in the forces he had brought to bear on and to second the work of the Little Sisters.

He succeeded in binding together the living forces of Christian society, headed by the priest; after him, on

one side the man of the world with his education and influence, and then the working man; on the other, the woman of the world with her faith and her heart, and the working man's wife and their children. Finally the Little Sister who, like a connecting link, keeps, in a sense, these various elements together, facilitating and endowing them with life and vigour. She is the servant of the poor and humble, but the Father by means of the decurions and the *Dames Servantes* gave her the power of working for the sanctification of the rich as well as for that of the poor.

The rich of whom the Little Sister asks her daily bread find her appeal irresistible. They realise that she belongs exclusively to the poor—the lowly—and her example is a powerful incentive to them to give disinterestedly, from love of Christ's little ones.

The holy founder well understood that the Little Sisters of the Assumption, faced with so arduous a mission, should be true religious. Accordingly he wished that they should make an hour's meditation daily, and recite the Office of our Lady in choir, and say the Rosary. Also that they should be faithful to the particular examination of conscience, and visit to the Blessed Sacrament; in short, to all the principal observances of a religious life. He therefore divided their day into three equal parts, eight hours' mission-work, eight hours of rest, and eight for prayer and community exercises. He gave all his care and solicitude to the organisation of the novitiate. He neglected nothing whereby the novices in their first (canonical) year, and afterwards in the second year of their novices' training, should be instructed in all the exercises of a nun's life,

by which they were to gain not only a solid knowledge of essential doctrinal matters, but that they should acquire a practical knowledge and experience of the virtues proper to the apostolic life.

The mission of the Little Sister, he used to say, requires her to exhibit special characteristics of good sense and judgement, hence it behoves her to have special training and development. During her novitiate, she should acquire a fundamental knowledge of religion: this being absolutely necessary for one whose mission brings her in contact with the working man who is frequently ignorant of any Christian teaching, and has only contempt and hatred for it. He likewise carefully traced out a programme of studies for her; and he established a special course of reading in the novitiate, not only with regard to the virtues and obligations of a religious life, but of ecclesiastical and scriptural history which were afterwards followed up subsequent to their profession by lectures which were regularly given in the houses of the Little Sisters. In addition to the weekly conferences which the Father gave at the Mother House, he did not fail to give one in particular to the novices, with the object of forming their minds to the supernatural life and to a true devotion founded on the liturgy of the Church.

CHAPTER XI

Jesus, calling his disciples together, said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude."—*Mark viii 2.*

THE Fraternity of our Lady of the Assumption was welcomed joyfully by Mother Marie de Jésus. Her lofty intelligence took in all its bearings in the same way that her heart foresaw all its happy fruits. She assisted at all the meetings held at Grenelle, and the brotherhood delighted in giving her the name of Mother. She looked forward eagerly to the development of the work of the Daughters of St Monica, but it was still in its infancy at the time of her death.

Scarcely had fifteen years elapsed since this venerated Mother and her little family had settled in a tiny apartment in the Rue St Dominique, but in that short space of time the eight Sisters had multiplied to the extent that they occupied eleven flourishing houses. That of Perpignan, which had been founded in 1879 at the earnest desire of Bishop Caraguel, was followed by two *succursales*, at Issy and Montmartre, and preparations were being made for foundations at Lyons and in England.

For some time previous, the ladies belonging to the English society in Paris had been struck by the work at Grenelle and its results. Lady Georgina Fullerton—that admirable friend and apostle of the poor—the Marquise de Salvo, Lady Blount, amongst others, had asked for a foundation to be made in London. The anxiety caused by the Socialist party, which threatened the existence of all religious Congregations in France, hastened the desire of the founders to establish a footing

abroad. Once more Providence made use of the persecutions in one country to spread its benefits to another.

Père Pernet's ignorance of the English language did not deter him from undertaking the journey to London and commencing negotiations for this new departure. He started in July, 1880, for London and gave the following account of the journey:

"I have just arrived at Kensington. My journey was an easy one. The sea was so smooth that I might have thought myself in a pleasure-boat on the Seine. There was not a shadow of a wave. But from the time I left Dieppe I had to speak English *en Français*. The transition from one language to another was very abrupt. My ignorance of English was of use to me from the time I landed at Newhaven. I believe I was asked for my passport—I made answer by showing my railway ticket. To the cabman when I got to London, I presented my purse, saying: 'Friend, take what I owe you.'

"Cardinal Manning received us like a father. He has blessed our daughters often, and so kindly. His last words to me were: 'Come to me or to my Vicar-General as often as you like.' His Eminence has shown me the greatest consideration—more than I deserve. I have all possible faculties in his diocese, and he gave them himself to me in the kindest manner when I asked merely his authorisation to continue to say Mass. . . . We have quite decided upon settling at Bow in the East of London, and, now that a place is being sought for us there, everyone agrees that we are right; it is especially the advice of him who is in the place of our Lord in the diocese, so we can count on doing God's will and being blessed by him. Tell our children there is a great

opening here for apostolic zeal on the part of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. A holy priest, a true man of God, whom I met lately, said that the Little Sister realised a dream which he had entertained for a long time, and that she was called to do great good among the poor working class in London. The priest at Bow said that she would have to fight the religious indifference which she would find in England, and also the taint of pauperism, and to rouse the conscience of the poor, who are too often the object of men's contempt, by bringing them the light of faith by the exercise of charity—and thus restoring order, economy, peace and union, with faith and the love of God, in homes wrecked by the effects of disorder and bad passions.

"This view of the missionary character of the Little Sisters—namely, that in nursing the poor they aim at a Catholic regeneration of the working man's family—is that taken at Archbishop's House. We must redouble our efforts to obtain these graces from God through the intercession of our Lady and to realise the opportunity given us to the full extent of our faith and our powers."

On September 18 he writes again to his novices:

"Oh, my children, let us make haste! let us not lose time nor dissipate our heart or our strength over follies. You know the immense field ready for the harvest which awaits you in Paris and in all the working class all over France. The harvest field in London—and perhaps everywhere in England—is even greater in extent. What a population there is! what misery, what ignorance, what depravity! Appearances are not so bad, but, below the surface, what an appalling reality exists. The evil is so widespread, so deep, so inveterate. The good, on the other hand, meets with so much opposition in

all directions, that if one had only oneself to consult, one would abandon the task as a useless enterprise. May the Divine Master not reject us on account of our unworthiness.

“Do you not agree with me that if the chance was given us of shedding our blood for the great cause of the Redemption and the salvation of souls, it would be a supreme joy, the greatest consolation we could have in this deluge of iniquity and miseries which poisons men and nations? But, my children, we are not worthy. Work energetically in my absence to deserve the grace of wearing yourselves out in the service of the Church, and above all of living and dying for our Saviour Jesus Christ. May he be blest and loved for ever and ever.

“Your poor Father is going to continue to preach the retreat to your Sisters till Thursday. . . .”

The development of the Congregation, and the blossoming of flowers and fruit in the works which gravitated round the venerable Mother, were the precursors of the end of the life and labours of her whom God had chosen and led for the space of nearly twenty years. Mother Marie de Jésus' frail health began to fail. Worn out by fatigue—mental and physical—her strength no longer responded to the calls she made upon it. Her ever active mind and tender heart got no support from her exhausted frame. In a letter to one of her daughters in London, she said: “Courage, my child. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence; carry your cross whilst offering it for the work, and with the object of fructifying the land of England, which is destined to bear much fruit if generous souls are to be

found who will devote themselves to the cause of God's glory and the salvation of souls."

The deadly disease which was to rob her of life whilst it gave her to God obliged her to take to her bed on May 16, 1883.

She had just concluded all arrangements for the foundation at Lyons. The Little Sisters who had been invited there by H.E. Cardinal Caverot were going to settle in the district of Guillotière. She had assisted on that same day at the meeting of the *Dames Servantes*, and left the room in great pain and exhaustion. She was not able to appear at Mass the next morning, and her daughters never saw her there again. It would be impossible to describe their grief. Apprehensions, succeeded by hope, alternated with renewed apprehensions. Prayer, sacrifices of every kind were offered up by the Sisters for the recovery of their much-loved Mother. It was a touching sight, which was renewed every morning, to see the Sisters with arms stretched out in the form of a cross interceding for her recovery: and it seemed impossible that our Lord could resist such petitions. But his ways and his designs are inscrutable. Meanwhile, the complaint continued to make rapid progress.

The holy foundress, during the four months of acute suffering which ensued, never ceased to give her daughters an example of every virtue.

Père Pernet, not knowing what he could do to prolong a life which was so precious to the Congregation, and being told that waters might be found beneficial in her case, proposed this remedy to her. She answered with some surprise: "How could you propose to me, Father, to go to take waters! Should I, a nun, who has

made a vow of poverty, have recourse to means which are utterly opposed to my state of life? No, no, I implore you, do not ask such a sacrifice of me."

The Father, much edified, gave in to her wishes.

Mother Marie de Jésus was accustomed to go with her daughters yearly to look after the sick in the great national pilgrimage to Lourdes. She felt it a duty to guide and assist them in what was a most consoling mission, but which was an undertaking quite apart from their special work.

On August 18, 1883, the Mother was at her worst, so that all her faith and submission were needed for her to make up her mind to undertake the long journey to Lourdes; but, giving in to the entreaties of her religious family, she took her place among the poor sufferers who were going there to ask for their cure through our Blessed Lady's intercession.

Père Pernet accompanied the pilgrims and never ceased devoting himself to the work of hearing confessions; he also allowed himself the consolation of spending a night in prayer at the grotto.

It was a touching sight to see the venerated Mother on her stretcher praying before the shrine of the Apparitions in company with a multitude of other poor sufferers. Forgetful of her own pains, she had a kind and tender smile for all, and many asked to have their stretchers placed in her vicinity in order to ask for her prayers, and were persuaded that to be in her neighbourhood would cause their petitions to be favourably heard. Our Lady did not cure the holy foundress, but there was a temporary improvement in her health while she was at Lourdes, which enabled her to make the return journey in a relatively easier manner.

Her health improved during the days following her pilgrimage, and hopes were raised of her recovery, but they were soon to prove short-lived, and before long they had to be abandoned. Mother Marie de Jésus was never under any illusion about her state from the beginning, and throughout her malady she exhibited ever the same serenity and peace of mind. She was ready to receive with her habitual kindness the numberless people who asked to see her, and always had a good and amiable word for those who came to her, appropriate to their trials or requirements.

On September 14, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, she received the Last Sacraments. The ceremony which, owing to circumstances, was imposing in the extreme, took place in the room where at the founder's side she had presided at the meetings of the *Dames Servantes*. Père Pernet at 9 in the morning, accompanied by Père Hippolyte, the confessor of the community, entered the room bearing the Blessed Sacrament. He was followed by all the Sisters, who knelt around their Mother's couch. After the first blessing, the Father, holding the sacred Host in his hand, made the venerated foundress renew her profession of faith in all the articles of our holy religion. She then repeated in a firm voice the formula of her vows. Before receiving Holy Communion, she turned to her daughters, and, fixing a prolonged and loving look upon them, she asked their forgiveness. Père Pernet then administered Extreme Unction to her. After the conclusion of the ceremony, he asked her to bless her children.

"I bless them all," she said, "those who are here and those who are far off, and those who will come later—I bless them all."

Then she added:

"I do not forget one member of the family of the Assumption which has been so devoted to us; may you be ever united with it."

Père Pernet said: "My daughter, I believe God calls you. . . . If he wills that you should remain with us, we shall bless him for it, but if he wishes you in heaven, we shall not oppose his will. I have received your last recommendations and your last intentions, and, more than that, your last wishes. . . . You will continue always to be the Mother . . . one can have but one mother, and from the heights of heaven you will watch over your children."

Mother Marie de Jésus turned to the Sisters and said with marked emphasis:

"My children, be courageous, strong, generous. Do not imitate me. Love our good God. May you be saints."

The following day, September 15, was a day of great suffering to the holy foundress; all felt that she was pining for the moment when God would put her martyrdom to an end.

"My daughter," the Father said to her, "we must will what God wills, when he wills, and as he wills; it would be an imperfection for us to wish to go to heaven quicker than it pleases God to take us there. You would gain less merit for your children."

"My Father," she said, "pray for me. I have got to the end of my powers, but not of my courage."

She asked to see all the postulants in succession; then the novices who were in their first and second year. The novitiate had been recalled from Sèvres in the previous year, and was at this time definitely settled at Grenelle, where the roof had been raised, thus

giving a fourth story for the accommodation of the novices.

As the Mother's sufferings were ever becoming more violent, she was heard sometimes to cry out in her agony: "My Jesus, mercy." On one of these occasions, Père Pernet said to her: "We should honour God—should we not? Well, the greatest honour we can pay him is to honour him in our sufferings, acknowledging that he is always right, and that we are nothing, and are sinners."

The founder had never failed since the beginning of the work to assemble the community every Sunday and Thursday for a sermon or conference. On Sunday, September 16, which was the feast of the Seven Dolours, he did so according to his custom. After a few words about our Lady at the foot of the Cross, he continued as follows:

"My children, what is happening to-day in your little family is somewhat analogous to what I have been saying. I have witnessed your Mother's great sufferings during the course of her illness, which, in these last days, have been notably increased; it is the agony of death prolonged, as there is not a part of her body which is not in pain. She is at the foot of the Cross, and she is suffering, with a heart which never falters, for you. She might say, thinking of you—and you are always in her thoughts—'The eyes of the Lord are on my anguish and my tears have borne fruit.' You are fortunate in possessing such a Mother. In the largeness of her heart, she takes you all in. . . . Oh, if it is our good God's will that there should be a passing separation between you and her, it is certain that she will continue to be your Mother when she is with him, and that she

will be a powerful help and source of grace to you. She said to me yesterday: 'Father, give me leave to depart'; and I answered: 'Yes, my daughter, but the more you suffer, the more you will get grace and life for those around you.' Yes, my children, your Mother has truly given birth to you; not to your vocation, for that is from God, but to that spiritual life which God asks of you in your mission and for your sanctification. If we do not rejoice in the midst of our sorrow, it is because we are not saints; but let us resign ourselves; let us take confidence whatever happens; and let us believe that great good for our souls, for our mission and for our poor people will come of this great trial."

At 6 o'clock in the morning on September 17 the Father announced to her that he was going to bring her holy Viaticum; she welcomed the news gladly. *Ma Sœur* Bigourdan, the Superior of the community of Sisters of Charity in the Rue Monceau, came to visit Mother Marie de Jésus as she lay on her death-bed. The meeting was a deeply touching one. The holy Superior wished to show her sympathy with the foundress and her work once more, and to recommend herself to her intercession when she reached the eternal shores. Before leaving she put an envelope into Mother Marie de Jésus' hands containing a cheque for 500 francs, with a sketch of a tabernacle—showing the object of the offering. The kind intention of the giver was very obvious; she knew well the difficulties which had attended the building of the convent chapel and wished to share them.

The community was roused before daybreak on September 18, and the Father brought the Viaticum to Mother Marie de Jésus, who appeared to be in her agony. Comforted by the adorable Master, she again

rallied, and was visited during the course of the day by a great many of her children. Gently and serenely she sank to rest—preserving in her last moments the characteristics of her whole life. She could no longer speak, but she appeared conscious of what the Father said to her. The Sisters recited the rosary at her bedside, and when they stopped, as they sometimes did at the end of a decade, she made a sign of the cross as if to encourage them to continue. Her gentle countenance no longer bore the impress of acute suffering, it reflected the peace and serenity of her soul.

The Passion of our Lord in the gospel of St John was read to her, and prayers continued without intermission. The Sisters, again and again, recited the *Salve Regina*, a prayer which expressed so forcibly what was passing in their souls; and, whilst their tears flowed, they implored the Blessed Virgin to cast an eye of mercy on their Mother and deliver her from the land of exile, for now no doubt could exist as to the will of God in her regard. They could not take their eyes off their much-loved Mother; her departure hence bore all the signs which we read of in the death of the saints.

Finally, at 6 in the evening, there was a slight revival, nature made a last effort; the eyes of the venerated mother Marie de Jésus opened; they were cast first towards heaven, and then on her daughters; she made a slight movement with her arm, and then her soul took flight to her Creator.

The Father then said in a firm voice:

“My children, your Mother has departed; for more than twenty years she taught you how to live, she has now taught you how to die.”

At this moment the sound of a bell was heard; it

was ringing the Angelus. The Sisters, after reciting the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—the fiat of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Heaven—went in turn to kiss their Mother's hand. They then clothed her in her religious habit, and the body was laid out in the room in which she died, which was transformed into a *chapelle ardente*.

On September 20 the Father, having received full powers from the Archbishop, blessed the new chapel. Though the chapel was a small and unpretentious one, several years were taken in building it from want of means to employ a proper contractor. Its construction was a source of constant anxiety to the venerable foundress, who could only afford to pay a few workmen at a time, and to employ them from day to day only, while the money lasted. Fearing to add to the Father's anxieties, she bore hers in silence; but, on more than one occasion, she was heard to say: "Oh, that chapel! It will bring me to the grave."

She had had the consolation three weeks before her death of being carried down to the chapel, and had admired its proportions, and rejoiced at seeing how nearly it approached to completion. Thus the building was sufficiently advanced at the time of the foundress's death—though far from finished—to allow of preparations being made for the blessing and funeral service.

The proceedings commenced by the Father, followed by the community, entering the room where the holy Mother lay exposed in her coffin: carried by six of her daughters, she was the first to enter the chapel whose erection had been an object so near her heart and which had cost her such sacrifices. A number of the other Sisters carried candles and lilies, with which the body

was surrounded when it was placed under the catafalque.

The Requiem was performed on September 21. A great and deeply impressed and sympathetic crowd attended it. Deputations from several religious Orders were present, amongst whom was the Dominican Father Père Faucillon, besides a number of the religious of the Order of the Assumption and secular clergy. Père Pernet offered up the holy Sacrifice.

Many devout persons came forward at the conclusion to touch the hands of the holy nun with rosaries, medals, and even with linen cloths. People came from all parts to contemplate her peaceful countenance and to pray beside her. The sound of the Angelus bell, reminding the faithful of Mary's "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," coincided with the departure of Mother Marie de Jésus—her life's work being done. She was succeeded in the office of Superior-General by Sister Marie du Saint Sacrement, and again the Angelus—at the moment of her election—gave the same joyful tidings: this time it came as an intimation to her, whom the foundress had looked upon with special favour and affection, that she was to take up the work in the same spirit as that which had animated her holy predecessor.

At 7 p.m. of the evening of September 21 the remains of Mother Marie de Jésus were placed by her daughters in the coffin. This was placed provisionally in the former chapel. A few days later, to their great consolation, permission was received from the authorities for the body to be buried in a vault, prepared for it in what is now known as the lower chapel.

CHAPTER XII

If all loved, and were loved in return, we should no longer harm one another; all evils would cease, sin as well as vice would be unknown to us.—ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.

THE much revered foundress, though her earthly career is over, is not dead to the Little Sisters of the Assumption; she lives in their hearts, and will continue to do so to-morrow as much as she does to-day. The great grief of separation was softened by the union of hearts and minds which existed between them. The Little Sisters, submissive to the will of God, continued their prayers and sacrifices for the Mother's soul, and to walk on the path she had traced for them, assured of her happiness and protection before the throne of God. They made such a point of getting her loved and known, that no difference could be discerned between those who had known Mother Marie de Jésus during her lifetime and the other members of the Institute who had only come into it after her death.

Her grave became the rallying-point of the Congregation, and caused the mother-house where she had lived and suffered, and from whence she had taken her flight to heaven, to become dearer than ever to her children.

Numerous foundations were made by the Father in the years that followed; the Little Sisters were sent to Notting Hill in London, and in 1885 to Nîmes, where he rejoiced to see the works which sprung from the parent root of the Assumptionist Order grouped round the grave of the founder Père d'Alzon. At the same time Cardinal Foulon asked for a new house for Lyons for the district of the Croix Rouge. Père Pernet was in the habit of visiting these centres of action frequently;

his efforts were untiring to inspire his daughters with the spirit of zeal wherewith to animate the mission confided to them. Wherever he went he started the work of organising plans of perseverance, which were to continue the Sisters' apostleship in the working man's home after the Sisters had concluded their mission of mercy.

The number of the Little Sisters was far from sufficient to supply the calls made upon them; the Father suffered deeply from this impossibility of complying with appeals made to him. His constant prayer was: "My God, multiply us, sanctify us, and may thy kingdom come." He used to recommend this prayer to his daughters.

The novitiate meanwhile could not contain the number of novices; but the answer to a novena to the great Archangel Michael enabled the Sisters to get possession of a piece of ground adjoining the mother-house, on which a house was built for their accommodation.

At the beginning of the year 1890 Père Pernet, who never took account of his health—naturally so delicate—fell a victim to influenza, which was raging at that time in Paris. The Sisters were first attacked, and, hoping to stay the epidemic, he personally blessed the whole house. Very shortly afterwards, in the early days of January, after saying his Mass, he had to take to his bed. Great fears were felt for his life almost from the beginning; Dr. Ménard, who attended him throughout his illness and was a devoted friend, having been a student in the Assumptionist College, took a very gloomy view of the case. For a month the Father hovered between life and death. Prayers and sacrifices

CONVENT OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE
ASSUMPTION, NOTTING HILL, LONDON.



THE CONVENT.



THE CHAPEL.

were incessantly offered up by his daughters that he might be spared—if only for ten years—so as to complete the work of which he had laid the foundations.

Père Pernet was then sixty-five years of age. God allowed himself to be moved by these earnest supplications. The fever diminished, and a gradual improvement took place in his health.

The holy founder was a constant source of edification to his brethren during his illness; nothing could exceed his patience, his obedience and his resignation to the divine will. When the infirmarian brought him some comforting drinks, he used to ask if the other members of the community were equally well treated. For a long time he refused to give up sleeping on his straw paillasse till he was obliged under obedience to use a mattress. Those who were constantly coming into contact with him said: “His behaviour was that of a saint, and he seemed to us to be ripe for heaven, and this,” they added, “made us fear for him even more than his illness. All his thoughts were directed to our Lord, and his only desire was to accomplish his will.”

As soon as he was well enough, he wrote a few lines to the Superior-General at Grenelle:

“Please tell our daughters that having been deprived of the happiness of saying Mass, I found a means of consoling myself by assisting at it spiritually both by day and by night. In order to do this, I united myself, with all the love and faith I could muster, to our divine Saviour, who never ceases to continue his sacrifice on Mount Calvary by immolating himself by the hands of his priests on the altars which cover every part of the habitable globe. And I said: ‘O Eternal Father, O my God, I adore thee profoundly through thy Son, our Lord,

and by him; I give thee thanks for all things from the bottom of my heart; I detest my sins and beg thy forgiveness for them. Finally, I beg thee to give me the grace I require for every moment, and that I may correspond with it always. And this I ask, O my God, through and with thy only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen.'

"This is my new Mass, which is as good as it is short. You could do the same, and say it at all hours of the day and night and wherever you go, and, especially, while sitting up at night with the sick, and for them."

Père Pernet owned that his mental sufferings during this illness far exceeded those which were merely physical. He felt the approach of death, and was penetrated with fear of the judgements of God.

"Ask the grace of God," he said, "that it will please him to give me a little peace and tranquillity of soul, as I am in great mental anguish. I shudder when I think not only of my sins, but that I have been a dispenser of God's graces. Implore of our merciful God that he may give me a few more years to live so that I may become a saint; but if he wills to take me, beg him to have mercy on me."

He was six weeks confined to his bed; at the end of that time he was sufficiently recovered to visit the community at Grenelle.

"What a good thing an illness is!" he said to them. How it brings one nearer to God! . . . I beg of you not to pray that my career may be prolonged, but that I may become a saint and make up for lost time. Let us devote our lives to God's service and the good of souls."

He had then far from recovered, and his strength was a long time in returning. His time during his slow convalescence was spent principally in prayer and in nourishing his soul, whenever his extreme weakness permitted, in reading spiritual books.

"I am devouring," he said on one occasion, "the Treatise on the Love of God. How beautiful it is! What profound knowledge the saint has of theology and of the doctrines of grace, and also of the human heart! St Francis de Sales was my master when I was in the novitiate, and I have never ceased reading him and loving him."

After a time the anxiety of his daughters gave way to joy at his recovery. Père Pernet felt the vigour of health returning, and he resumed his work with renewed energy. There was one serious result, however, of his terrible illness; it was that his eyesight was seriously threatened by a rapidly progressing atrophy of the optic nerve. The Father, though he submitted patiently to the treatment and assiduous care of the oculist whom he consulted, made no change in his way of life; he continued to devote himself unceasingly to the care of souls.

The Little Sisters celebrated the silver jubilee of the foundation of their Congregation on July 2, 1890. Solemn Mass was offered up by the founder in thanksgiving to our Lord for the innumerable graces he had never ceased bestowing on the work.

The Archbishop of New York had repeatedly applied to the mother-house to make a foundation of the Congregation of the Little Sisters in the chief city of his diocese. In 1891 Père Pernet was able to comply with this desire. He despatched six Sisters, who began from the moment

of their arrival to devote themselves to the work of nursing the poor. So far, with the exception of the victim God had chosen from the outset of the work, the Little Sisters had nursed infectious cases times without number and had escaped contagion. But in beginning their work in the New World, he asked for the first fruit of their life of self-devotion. One of the earliest cases they were called upon to attend was that of a mother who, as well as her children, was laid up with typhus fever. The needs of this poor family were so urgent that the Sisters never left them—taking it in turns to nurse them day and night. The mother had begun to recover when one of the Sisters caught the disease. The case of Sister Marie Euphrasie (like that of Sister Marie Denise) was seen to be hopeless from the first. No remedies availed to stop the progress of the malady. Providence appeared to accept the willing victim in order that by the sacrifice of her life, and her intercession in heaven, she should bring down its choicest blessings on the newly founded mission to America. Denise and Euphrasie! pure and gentle victims, you were singled out to be the protectors of the work of the Little Sisters and to safeguard them from heaven.

Letters from New York announcing Sister Marie Euphrasie's illness were followed within a very short time with news of her death.

"Who would have supposed," wrote her Superior, "that our Lord would have asked such a sacrifice of us? . . . Her conduct during her illness was as edifying as it had been during her life. She was in the beginning far from thinking herself in danger or on the brink of death, but the moment she realised it, she disposed herself to die in as holy dispositions as she

could. She lost all interest in mundane affairs at once, and when Père Brun brought her holy Viaticum, she pronounced the formula of her vows with perfect resignation and piety: there was a touching sound in the way she repeated the words 'and this for ever.' She made the sacrifice of her life for the Church, for the whole Order of the Assumption, and for the foundation at New York. We had placed a picture of our venerated Mother near her bedside. I reminded her of it and said, "Perhaps our holy Mother will plead for her little American missionary." 'No,' she answered, 'I shall go and see her in heaven.' And then when I insisted that she should ask for her cure, she said: 'Oh, I do not refuse to go on working, but may the will of God be done.'"

The holy founder spoke as follows at a meeting which he held of the Sisters at Grenelle:

"Though the death of Sister Marie Euphrasie causes us sorrow, it is not a misfortune; it is quite the contrary, being a cause of happiness for her and of good for the Congregation. That dear child had always corresponded with God's particular designs upon her. She received a call from him and entered religion when she was only sixteen years of age. Her life in the novitiate was irreproachable; her simplicity and single-mindedness were such that her one idea was to do what she was told in order to please our Lord. She has always been a bright example. When she was first chosen to go to the foundation in London, she offered herself as a sacrifice to God in order that the mission of the Little Sisters might help for the conversion of souls in that country where heresy has worked such ravages. She was in the same dispositions when she was sent to America: that

is, ready to sacrifice her life that the kingdom of God might come. This intention never left her; she never lost sight of it, and when she had to perform an action at a cost to human nature, she used to say to herself: 'I am a victim, I must suffer for these poor people.'

"This time the divine Master took her at her word; he accepted the sacrifice she made him for America.

"This was what was said of her in the New York papers: 'The Little Sisters of the Assumption, who have lately settled here with the object of nursing the sick poor, have lost one of their members, Sister Marie Euphrasie, aged twenty-five. She died, not from an ordinary cause, but in consequence of her devoted services to a poor mother and her family whom she nursed for a month. She died a martyr to charity.' Unquestionably, my children, it was in consequence of her devoted services to the poor and suffering that she was taken ill and went to heaven. I little knew that I was a true prophet, when, on receiving the profession of her perpetual vows before she started for America, I said to her that she had to gain three crowns: the virgin's crown, the apostle's crown and the crown of martyrdom."

A veritable ovation was given to the humble Little Sister's memory at her burial service, and Mgr. Corrigan, Archbishop of New York, was amongst those who came to pray at her grave. When all was over the Protestant doctor, who had attended the sick family, came to the convent to express his sympathy at their loss, and to say that the husband had now fallen a victim to the fell disease and there was no one to nurse him. The Superior responded at once to this appeal and undertook to nurse the poor man.

About this time a foundation was made in Dublin at the invitation of Archbishop Walsh. It had been eagerly expected by some generous and devoted benefactors. A few months later a house was established under the patronage of H.E. Cardinal Foulon at St Étienne, in the diocese of Lyons.

In 1893 Père Pernet, who had then attained his sixty-fifth year and was suffering from his defective eyesight, which, in spite of an operation, was getting ever weaker, made up his mind to go and visit his daughters in America. He embarked in the *Gascogne*, and was able to say Mass several times on board ship. The last day the weather was so favourable that ten of the passengers assisted at it, and he had the consolation of giving Holy Communion to the four Little Sisters who accompanied him, and were destined to add to the number of the community in New York. Ever desirous of sowing good seed, he gave a little exhortation to his congregation, inviting them to thank God for the favourable passage, and to ask his grace that, by accomplishing his will through life, they might arrive at the haven of a blessed eternity. He said afterwards that the voyage had been a true retreat for him.

Père Pernet spent three weeks in New York. He wrote thence to Grenelle as follows:

“We arrived at the appointed time at New York, in spite of the rough weather which lasted during the greater part of our voyage. The entrance into New York by sea is exceedingly striking. . . . The New World under the radiance of brilliant sunshine showed itself in an aspect of grandeur which remains engraven on the imagination. Our new missionaries, your four ‘Little Sisters,’ set foot on land with a marked feeling of

gratitude for dangers escaped which was shared by your servant. . . . I am pleased with all that I have seen. Your Sisters—our children—are really well established here. They are working hard. They will have to give up nursing the less serious cases next week in order to attend the exercises of the Retreat which I am going to give them. The Meeting of good works will be begun this week by the ceremony of affiliation of the *Dames Servantes*. The Archbishop of New York will preside at the meeting. The Daughters of St Monica have made a most satisfactory start. Pray, my daughters, let us all pray together, that my lengthy journey may not prove fruitless for the good of your Congregation nor for the reign of our Lord. Thank him for having brought your sisters to this country where there is so much to be done for that blessed kingdom. . . . There is much vitality here; the people are full of life and aspirations for the future. . . .”

Having left home at the end of April, Père Pernet was back in the middle of June. He ever preserved a consoling impression of the journey, and promised himself some day to renew it. He continued his work of visiting the houses of the Little Sisters in the same spirit of courage and joy. It was a constantly renewed pleasure to him to find himself in their midst. With what joy he spoke to them, saying: “Love God, my children. You must love him in order to make him loved.”

The Sisters were not the only people to bear witness to the ardour of his love of God, and to the supernatural charm which was perceptible to all who approached him.

M. Mazodier of the Fraternity used to say that when

speaking of Père Pernet (especially if the conversation was between him and his intimate friends), one was struck with the lively, one might almost say boyish, tone of his conversation. One might have taken him for a young missionary. He was full of "go," and warmth, and vivacity. He never made use of pompous, high-sounding words. What he had to say he expressed in familiar terms and sometimes with striking imagery. He had the natural gaiety of the pure of heart, and he by no means despised a harmless jest.

"Those amongst us who have had the happiness of intimate intercourse with him have been astounded at his incomparable serenity. Absorbed as he was by the cares of a vast administration, founder of a great religious family, the confidant and witness of much suffering and misery, one would have been prepared to see him show marks of anxiety, to appear at times preoccupied and careworn. But nothing troubled his peace of mind. He abandoned himself to Providence with perfect confidence, saying: 'God will provide.' Those who asked his blessing in illness or times of trial—I speak from my own experience—felt themselves irresistibly moved to take confidence and to hope. The consoling thoughts he gave one went straight to the heart, and one was no longer tempted to complain after hearing him speak of God's goodness and mercy; all nature's impatient murmurs seemed lulled as if by enchantment.

"The members of the Fraternity found a true father in him. They confided all their cares and trials to him, and always left him strengthened and comforted, and full of confidence in God. He has been heard to say in familiar conversation, speaking of his dear workmen,

‘What good fellows they are ! What a pleasure it is to have to do with them !’

“His words when speaking of God seemed really inspired. I felt this impression for the first time when he assembled us in order to found the Fraternity. ‘My friends,’ he said, ‘I have not come to you to make you any promises, nor to offer you any temporal advantages. I have nothing to give, and, on the other hand, I have a great deal to ask of you. But I speak in the name of God, to whom you owe everything. He wishes you to renew here your engagement to live as faithful Christians, and, as you are weak, he asks you to unite in order to give each other a good example and to cause his laws to reign in your families.’

“These words were spoken with force and almost in a tone of command. I remarked this fact to the Father, and he answered: ‘Workmen and all who live humble lives are the friends of our good God. They recognise his voice; it is unnecessary to use circumlocution in order to make them attend. Believe me, they have souls by nature open to truth, and they resist God’s appeals less than do others. One must not be afraid, therefore, of asking fidelity to their duties from them.’”

This strong confidence, and predominance of supernatural views, appear again in the opinions expressed by Père Pernet on the subject of the religious persecution in France and of our country’s troubles. The persecution distressed him, but it did not succeed in damping his hopes. He had the firm belief, which nothing earthly could shake, that the tempest would be dissipated before long, after having manifested God’s glory by the confusion of the wicked and the redoubled pursuit of virtue by the good.

"Our cause is that of our good God," he would say, "it must triumph, but at the cost of our sufferings. It is for this cause that we are on earth and that we belong to this nation, and for this only. How can we give way to despair when we see how the Pope relies on us; the Pope has his reasons. Let us then take confidence."

One of Père Pernet's brethren in religion said of him that his solidity of judgement, which never failed him, was the result of a natural intelligence steeped in supernatural light, and this gave him an irresistible power in carrying conviction to all whom he encountered. The working man listened to his words with what may be termed a *pious* attention; one could trace, in the silence and the tense expression of his hearers, the power and effects of the apostolic language he used in the hearts and minds of those whom he addressed. No one who has heard him speak at the Meetings of the Fraternity or the Mothers' Meetings could forget the atmosphere which reigned in them. There was a *virtue* in him when he spoke, and this virtue was exercised on all who listened to him.

If it was a question of the direction of souls, he saw them to their very depths, and he gave such proofs of this knowledge to those who consulted him that they frequently put implicit confidence in him from the beginning of their acquaintance with him. This knowledge of souls gave the Father a great and very rare precision in his direction; vague sentimental piety was quite alien to his instructions. It allowed also of his being very short in hearing confessions. "I aim," he once said, "at going straight to the fundamental principle without stopping at details and accessory matter."

Père Pernet may be said to have had an unfailing

judgement on doctrine and good works. As regards the latter, he asked for a supernatural spirit that took no account of worldly views; he took the line that men should be at the service of the work and not *vice versa*. He had a marvellous perspicacity for discovering the weak or dangerous sides of new systems or theories, and saw them sooner than many others. Another of his brethren in religion said of him: "Père Pernet never judged a case without putting himself in the place of the person whom he had to advise and without weighing well the consequences. He had a truly admirable knowledge of the things of God and of the ways that lead to him. Many, accordingly, who required advice about their sacred ministry, their apostolate, or their own sanctification went to him and received light and assistance such as they could only attribute to the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He possessed the gift of wisdom—one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost—because he was always praying, his conversation was always in heaven, and because he maintained a close and habitual union with God. He possessed this because he lived by faith. Everyone felt when they had recourse to Père Pernet, and asked his advice, that not only his judgement was to be trusted, but that he had spoken and was guided in spiritual matters by personal experience.

CHAPTER XIII

With all watchfulness keep thy heart, for life issueth out from it.—
Proverbs iv 23.

BEFORE going into details about the last years of Père Pernet's life it would be as well to give a résumé of his interior life.

"I am a priest and a religious," he said joyfully on one occasion. And this priest—the member of a religious Order—was also founder of a religious Congregation and gave an example of the practice of the theological and moral virtues during the whole of his life. The truths of our holy religion and the teaching of the Church were at the base of all his supernatural life. He looked upon everything from the point of view of faith, and thus he was led in all things back to God.

He often repeated that we should ever rest on the word of God, which cannot deceive. "Let us not indulge in sentimental piety; that is not true devotion. Let us put all our faith in our Lord and be ready to give our life in the cause of truth. Truth and charity: that is what is wanted for our life on earth and afterwards in heaven."

Conversation with Père Pernet always terminated on the supernatural; he may be said to have always had the eye of his soul fixed on God.

"Men are nothing," he would say, "one must not build one's hopes on creatures. God alone is all things; he can do all. Let us lean upon him, hope in him, expect all things from him in time and eternity. As for men—how weak, how short-sighted they are!"

All the history of the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption shows the unbounded faith and confidence

in God of their venerated founder. His confidence was carried to such lengths that at times it gave him an interior conviction which caused him to undertake enterprises in spite of what seemed insurmountable obstacles. These two virtues show what was the extent of divine love that animated him. . . . He used to speak of our Lord not only as of one for whom alone he lived, but also as of the one for whom he longed that the whole world should live. He made people realise by the way he spoke of the depth of intimacy of love which united him to his good Master, and this intimacy showed itself again in his prolonged hours of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It was from prayer that he derived the inspiration of the works that he undertook in God's service, and in prayer that he found the strength to execute them. He had often to take the hours he should have spent in sleep in spiritual exercises, having spent his working hours in the service of others. When the bell summoned the religious to the choir, he was generally to be found there, and it was not unusual for him to rise at three or four in the morning to pray.

When he returned in the evening to the Rue François Ier after a busy day spent in the exercise of his priestly duties, it was in the chapel, at the foot of the tabernacle, that he sought rest. Thus, when he was asked for in the parlour the porter was accustomed to seek him in the chapel before looking for him in his room. His daily Mass was his one joy and consolation. "To a priest," he said, "Mass is everything." All his efforts were directed in his continual travels to the end that he should not be deprived of the happiness of saying Mass. His greatest trial in his illnesses, and after the two operations to his eyes, was that he was

thereby prevented from celebrating the holy Sacrifice. . . . His very appearance when he approached the altar was changed. His person assumed a certain rigidity, and his walk (so humble at other times) put on a look of dignity. Yet there was nothing singular or exaggerated in his Mass; he only gave the required time to say it. In this as in all his practices of piety—and even more so in the case of the monastic exercises—he was accustomed to say that nothing should be displayed exteriorly of those things which belonged to the soul, the cell or to community life.

A priest whom Père Pernet directed remarked: "The tone of voice with which he recommended me to say Mass with great fervour was most touching; no words can describe the impression it made upon me. I felt when listening to him that he was a saintly priest in the full sense of the words."

For him to hear our Lord spoken of was pure enjoyment; his heart revelled in the thought of God's goodness and beauty and infinite perfections. His very look told of his "joy in the Lord."

If it is true that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, Père Pernet's heart must have been an ever-flowing fountain of divine love, and it might have been said of him that "the measure of his love of God was without measure." His numberless instructions all point to the same truth. Never did he omit for any reason whatever the conferences which he gave weekly to the community of the Little Sisters; to these he spoke with a precision, a force of expression, and, it may be said, a supernatural eloquence which was not usual with him before any other audience. He spoke to them in the character of a father and founder, and he

sought to put into their hearts all those sentiments of faith and zeal for God, his Church, and for souls with which his own heart was penetrated.

A *Dame Servante* spoke in the following manner of the special conferences directed to them: "It would have been a mistake to expect great eloquence or elaborate preparation in the Father's instructions at Grenelle. Humility for himself was all he looked for, and for others the good of souls. They were improvised, slow therefore; and he appeared to be obeying an interior leading, and was not afraid of repeating himself. At first it was difficult to keep one's thoughts from wandering, but little by little he touched one's heart and fixed one's attention; so that the result of his exhortations was a greatly increased desire to serve God more fervently. His constant refrain was, "God is so good, my daughters. We must try and love our good God."

M. Delepouve, the well-known barrister of that name, said: "All that can be said of Père Pernet can be comprised in three words: 'He loved God.' He did not love him selfishly in the solitude of his heart; he longed to make others love him. His discourses were animated by this expansive and generous love, and it made them eloquent. And not only his voice, but his look, his smile, his silence even—everything spoke of the love of God and invited people to love and serve him."

It was in the Directory which he wrote for his daughters, after the illness which he had in 1890 when he was at the point of death, that the founder found full expression for the love which consumed him. In this little book they have, as it were, the will and testament of their venerated founder, in which he defines with the

most perfect simplicity, combined with great elevation of thought, what he conceived to be the ideal Little Sister of the Assumption.

His favourite ejaculation was: "O my good Master! how good thou art." And so heart-felt was the way he uttered the words that like a dart of divine love it penetrated the souls of those around him.

His love of God was especially shown by his acceptance of trials and sacrifices. If the priest is bound to suffer because the sacerdotal grace makes him one holocaust with our Lord, if the religious is even more so bound on account of the tie which unites him to Christ being even closer, what must be the obligation to self-sacrifice of a founder of a religious family.

Père Pernet was able to say of himself from a physical point of view: "I have never been a day without suffering." But God alone could sound the depths of the sorrowful mysteries which his soul had to encounter in its following of the divine Master. In his habitual relations with our Lord he was oftener with him in Gethsemani than on Thabor. God willed no doubt that having the guidance of souls in their trials and conflicts he should have the personal experience of such crosses. The courage and strength of mind which he showed in his sufferings were the outcome of his love of God, which inspired him with a thirst for self-sacrifice . . . so that he might be able to say to our Lord: "I have given you all."

On one particular occasion, he said to his daughters: "My children, in the religious life it is paradise to feel the blood impoverished, and life worn out in the service of God." Then he added playfully: "Don't forget that for little crosses there is little profit and little paradise."

The Blessed Virgin had the first place in his heart after our Blessed Lord. How he loved her! What tenderness he had for her, what admiration for her sacred prerogatives and the eminence of her sanctity! He tasted the sweetest joys on each one of her feasts, and they inspired him with the most sublime thoughts which he transmitted with an indescribable expression of love and devotion. His instructions were never more eloquent nor more supernatural in their simplicity than when he spoke of "our good Mother," as he loved to call her. In listening to him one felt one understood her better, realised more her greatness and beauty, and conceived a greater desire to love and imitate her.

On one occasion when he went to visit the house of the Little Sisters at Dublin, he showed this predilection in the childlike manner which was so characteristic of him. The Sisters had prepared a room for him in a building adjoining the convent which had previously been used as a stable, but they had forgotten to put a statue or picture of our Lady in it. The next morning he said to the Sister in charge: "You have made me very comfortable here—too much so, indeed—but you have omitted to put a picture of the Blessed Virgin in the room, and do you know it is a weakness of mine that I cannot sleep unless I see my *bonne Mère*."

This humble apartment of the revered founder was destined to become later on the sanctuary of the chapel of the Little Sisters in Dublin.

The most striking and notable consequence of the ardour of Père Pernet's love for our Lord and his Blessed Mother was his tender charity for his neighbour.

Like St Vincent de Paul his heart overflowed with charity to all men; especially to the little ones, the poor,

the wastrels (or what we should call in these days the "down and outs"), and even the stupid and clumsy, because, he used to say, nobody cared for them. He was for ever giving evidence of his benevolent spirit and kind and generous heart. He not only never judged, but even in the case of the guilty he was always prepared with an excuse for them. His favourite maxim was: "Never speak of your neighbour except in his praise; if nothing good can be said of him, keep silence." This was his own rule of conduct. No uncharitable word was ever heard on his lips, and not one which was not impressed with tender compassion for all miseries, moral as well as physical. Never did he harbour the smallest resentment against those who had opposed or behaved badly to him; a true disciple of the divine Master, his heart was full of love towards all. The salvation of souls is—or should be—the first duty man owes to his neighbour. And it was for this sublime end that he conceived the idea of giving a nursing Sister to console the poor in their afflictions and maladies, with the object of bringing them back to God, and so giving them courage to support the trials consequent on their condition in life.

Oh, how Père Pernet loved the poor! There was no limit to his compassion for them. He envied in a sense his daughters' vocation. "My children," he said to them, "I do not know of a more beautiful mission than yours except that of a priest. Yes, the angels would not hesitate, were the choice offered them, to come down to the earth and do what you are doing, even if such were to be their fate till the end of time."

His charity made him accessible to all, and with what kindness he treated those who came to him!

The Little Sisters nursed and assisted in her last moments a rag-picker of eighty-one years of age whom the Father had recommended to their care. They learnt from her how the acquaintance had begun. She told them for many years they used to meet at the same hour, and on the same spot, which was not far from the house in Rue François Ier. Père Pernet, when questioned about her, said that there was a something in her appearance which attracted him. "And although," he said, "she did not beg, I used often to give her four sous to buy herself snuff. When my purse was empty, I used to say, 'Good mother, I have nothing for you to-day.' She used to answer, 'It doesn't signify.' Sometimes we had a little talk, and when listening to her troubles, I had her soul in view, for I was not quite satisfied with the state she was in. So I rejoice to hear that she died as a good Christian."

He was talking one day to a poor mother of a family, and enquiring about her health, which was far from strong. Then, scarcely waiting for an answer, he went out of the room, and returned shortly afterwards with a bottle of quinine wine which he had been given as a tonic, saying: "Take this; you require it more than I do."

However busily engaged, he was always ready to go at once and hear the confession of anyone who asked for him. For the poor he had ever a kind word; and if it was a case of bringing a sick person back to God, he spared no time or exertion, and thanks to his goodness, which exercised an irresistible power over souls, he seldom failed in his endeavours.

When the Little Sisters encountered a hardened sinner on whom they could make no impression, they

had recourse to the Father, who succeeded on many occasions when, to all appearance, the case was a hopeless one.

Being on one occasion summoned to the bedside of a woman in a high fever who had resisted all efforts to induce her to make her peace with God, he said to her:

“ My poor child, what can I do for you to make you easier ?”

“ Leave me alone,” she said, “ I don’t want anything.”

“ But with your high fever you must be thirsty. Have you any soda-water to drink ?”

“ Ah, I should like some, but I haven’t any.”

The Father, glad to extract this admission and to be able to do something for the poor woman, went off at once to get a siphon, and brought it back to her hidden under his cloak.

No one will ever know all the acts of charity performed by Père Pernet in addition to those which the care of the Little Sisters and their work imposed upon him; only by accident did they come to light, as he never spoke of them. How numerous were the families whom he saved from despair; the poor little work-women in whom he interested himself! His greatest trial was to find himself helpless in the presence of the troubles of others.

Our revered Mother Marie de Jésus used to say to her daughters: “ I am constantly asked for by people whom I have never seen or heard of; they say they have been told to come by Père Pernet. Sometimes it is a case of a young girl who is in danger of losing her innocence; or of a widow who has children dependent on her; or it is question of a family who are in difficulties. . . . He is so kind that everyone feels safe

in asking for his help or protection, and when he can do nothing he sends the people on to us."

But it was *himself*, more than all else, that he put at the service of his neighbour. And he did so without counting the cost, thus carrying out his own programme, which was, "First of all God, then our neighbour and, if anything is left, ourselves." These words were a summing up of his life, and of the accomplishment of the first and greatest commandment at the cost of self-love. Thus he waged a continual war against egoism and all the forces that it brings into play.

A venerable priest wrote to us about Père Pernet in the following terms: "Père Pernet was still young when I first knew him. It was in 1872. I was educated at the Carmelite school. . . . He interested himself in our studies, and he willingly entered into plans to meet us and act as our guide to show us places of interest, and from which we could derive knowledge. He knew Paris well, and he said it was a savage ogre for those who came up from the country, and for young priests. I have known him hunt about for weeks to find places as professors for priests who wished to make a little money for their parents, who were dependent on them."

His charity towards his brethren in religion was proverbial. "No one excelled more than he did," writes one of them, "in that art of the saints which is to forget oneself for others. It was to the extent that few had any suspicion that whilst he was interesting himself so kindly and in such a supernatural manner in their different avocations, he was all the time suffering, and a prey to mental anguish and anxieties. His habit at recreation was to efface himself so as to let others talk. He had a great charm in his conversation; it was

always refined and agreeable; never rough-and-ready. It was of the nature of a ray of sunshine—illuminating and enlivening. Owing to this quality of Père Pernet, there was no member of his community with whom intercourse was more pleasant and easy.

“Père Pernet never left his convent without first paying a visit to any of the Fathers or lay-brothers who were ill, in order to say a kind word to them, and promise them his prayers and those of his daughters. What a great heart he had! One cannot repeat it too often; everyone had a place in it.”

“Each one of the community,” said another, “might have thought he was Père Pernet’s particular friend, so universal was his charity.”

There was one virtue by which the good Father was specially distinguished, and of which we have given many examples in these pages, and that was his humility. It was indeed in the opinion of all who knew him best his leading trait. He looked on himself in his intercourse with God in prayer as a poor sinner imploring God’s mercy. In the last few years of his life, he had ever in his heart and on his lips the prayer: “My God! I have grievously offended thee, I have abused thy gifts, I have injured my neighbour, I have neglected my duties; have mercy on me.”

“Let us,” he used to say, “make ourselves very small before the infinite majesty of God. Never should we be wanting in reverence to our good God. He is all things, and we are nothing. Let us not attribute to ourselves what we do, but refer everything to him.”

One was always conscious of this double sentiment in the Father’s soul, on one side the sense of the greatness of God, on the other of man’s nothingness.

The thought of the abasement of the Son of God was one which ravished his very soul. It penetrated him to the depths of his being when meditating on the Incarnation of the divine Word. Thus the feast of the Nativity of our Lord was one he specially loved, and he prepared for it with great fervour. His first vows, which, as we have already said, he made at the same time as Père d'Alzon, were pronounced on Christmas night. He wished his daughters should renew their vows every year on the same feast, and he neglected nothing to dispose them to do so well. When the moment approached for receiving Holy Communion at midnight Mass, when they repeated their holy engagements, he invited them with burning words to approach the divine Babe of Bethlehem with the confidence and love with which the poverty and obedience of the Son of God—Emmanuel, God with us—should inspire them and fill their hearts.

Père Pernet was hardly ever heard to speak of himself. He was ever modest, humble, discreet and self-effacing. If it sometimes (though rarely) happened that he was led to speak of some personal experience, as soon as he discovered that he had fallen into the trap laid for him, he changed the conversation, saying: "Let us talk of something more interesting."

On the other hand, he never concealed a cause for humiliation. One of his brothers in religion said Père Pernet used to accuse himself with touching humility every time that he thought he had been the involuntary cause of the smallest inconvenience. I have seen him really heart-broken when he was afraid he had given pain, or even when he had not come at once to the assistance of someone who required it; he used to be on

the watch to see what he could do in the way of rendering services or saying kind words.

When it was necessary for him to take exception at something or to find fault, he profited by the occasion in order to humble himself, saying: "I have given you a bad example; don't do as I do. We will try to correct ourselves—shall we not?"

There are many who, though they do not wish to be talked about, listen willingly to what people say about their good works. Père Pernet disliked both equally; to praise the work done by the Little Sisters redounded to his credit, so he would have none of it. He realised in his life that deep and beautiful saying of St Vincent de Paul: "The good in life does not make a noise, and noise in life does no good." His modesty was so deeply ingrained that it was pain and grief to him to hear from people of the importance of his work, and if he was obliged to listen to compliments on the subject, he did so as if they referred to others, and (as he told a friend on some occasion) "I think of the fable of the ass who carried the relics."

A priest of his acquaintance made use of the expression "my revered friend," when speaking to him. "Revered! revered! nothing of the sort!" and he abruptly changed the conversation.

A chalice presented to Père Pernet in 1875 was inscribed with his name followed by the title founder. He took great trouble to have the word erased, and did the same thing in the case of cruets to which the same word was attached. . . . "How little," we read in the *Messenger of the Students of the Assumption*, "those who came in contact with Père Pernet realised that one of the most important works in the Church owed its origin to him."

He used always to recommend his daughters to rank all the other Congregations higher in their esteem than their own. "You are the last in the Church," he used to say. "You should also be the smallest and humblest."

Whenever he made a fresh foundation, he laid stress on this point, saying: "You should trace your furrow with humility, and make yourselves known by your humble and hidden self-devotion."

He used the following words to one whom he had in view as the future guardian of the spirit of the Little Sister, and whom he consequently relied upon to maintain this virtue in the Congregation: "You will do great things for our Lord if you apply yourself sincerely to the task of being nothing. I ask this of you; that you put your whole confidence in him alone. Refer every single, slightest success to his honour and glory. I would rather see you exposed to the influence of some deadly pest than that of vanity and a vain self-complacency."

Animated by this spirit, Père Pernet had a horror of publicity and would never allow any means savouring of self-advertisement to be used in propagating the work of the Little Sisters. "They should make themselves known by their virtues, and by the good they are called upon to perform," he said.

The well-known writer Maxime du Camp, who was bringing out a book on the works of charity of our age, called upon Père Pernet. He had already drawn attention to several, and he came to get materials for an article on the work founded by Père Pernet, for which he professed a great admiration. He pointed out the advantage it would be to the Congregation to get better known in order to add to its resources, etc. It did not

take long, in the course of conversation, for the holy founder to perceive that the writer never rose above the purely humanitarian view of the question under discussion, and put aside all idea of the supernatural. He accordingly mentioned the fact, and tried to make the other understand that to ignore the supernatural side of a work was to speak of a body without a soul. This was a proposition, however, which Maxime du Camp passed over as one, apparently, unworthy of notice. Père Pernet, accordingly, remarked politely: "I fear that, differing as we do on first principles, we shall never come to an agreement." The writer departed, and in his book, which came out shortly afterwards, he made no mention of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

The following letter which he wrote to a young religious at Burgo de Osma, the novitiate of the Order, in 1881 is very characteristic of the spirit of humility and cordiality which governed all his actions:

"I am much touched and most grateful to you for having taken thought of a poor old Father who, though saying nothing, lives more with you than you might think possible. I see you, I count your numbers, I interest myself in the progress you make in learning as well as in the practice of religious virtues. What a consolation it is to us to remember in these sad and infidel times that there is a nursery of holy religious and apostles at Burgo who are our sons and our brethren, and who will replace the old worn-out trees whose lives are nearly spent. I know one who is nearing his end and who has never borne any fruit." Père Pernet concludes with the words "your poor brother in our Lord."

In a meeting in the Convent at Nîmes, at which the Father explained the origin and the objects of the Con-

gregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and of the Fraternity, and the Daughters of St Monica, it was noticed that he constantly made use of such expressions as these: "It was thought advisable," to do this, or the other. "It was decided," that such and such plan should be adopted. Nobody would have suspected that he was the founder of these good works. The same observer goes on to say: "Everyone present was not only struck by the humility of the holy religious, but by the supernatural virtue and power which seemed to animate his speech."

There was one mark of humility, and of genuine superiority, which Père Pernet never failed to exhibit, which was, that he constantly asked the advice, with perfect sincerity, of those who were much less experienced than himself. His humility also shone in his perfect obedience. His only object in life being that of accomplishing the divine Will, he drew from this absolute submission the patience and resignation necessary to endure the trials and contradictions which he met with throughout his life.

"Our good God is the Master," he used to say. "Let us submit to him."

Another striking feature in Père Pernet's life was that, in spite of being the founder and spiritual Father of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, he remained ever one of the most humble and obedient religious of his own Order. He grasped in an admirable manner the duty he owed to his superior as religious: complicated, as it was, by his mission of founder. And though called by God to be instrumental in the foundation of a work in the Church, he nevertheless always avoided taking action entirely on his own responsibility.

CONVENTS OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF
THE ASSUMPTION.



CLAPHAM, LONDON, S.W.



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He has thus left to his brethren in religion, as to his daughters, beautiful examples of a perfect obedience which, while true to the interests of his Congregation, never ran counter to that of his religious family. He was ever faithful when leading the community life to the duty of reciting divine Office in choir, even when, owing to his enfeebled sight, he could not do so without pain and difficulty. And when he was late, even for a legitimate reason, he used, in spite of his seventy or more years, to kiss the ground. In consequence of his love of punctuality he never passed over negligence in attendance at the community exercises, and he used to reprimand those guilty of that fault with firmness, saying: "The harm done to the regularity of a community by members of it being a minute or two late is not to be described; the order of the whole day suffers by it." He continually reminded the different houses of the Congregation of the importance of perfect exactitude at the exercises.

Another result of Père Pernet's spirit of faith and his humility was his obedience. Though the Father Subprior was a young religious, he applied to him for permission to go out, and went to receive his blessing before doing so, precisely as he would have done in the case of the Superior-General himself. And this supernatural spirit caused him to submit to the smallest prescriptions of the Rule with the simplicity of a child, or rather that of a saint. A simplicity which is closely akin to humility was one of Père Pernet's chief characteristics.

"To be simple is to be without subterfuge," he used to say. Again, one of his favourite sayings was: "A simple heart is another word for a guileless heart."

If humility kept him abased in his nothingness before God, simplicity gave him wings to fly to him. "To take fifty roads to go to God is all wrong; one should take one's heart and give it to him at a single bound."

As he had no personal object in his actions and only sought God's glory, his relations with his neighbours bore the same impress of simplicity and candour. He was simple and dignified in his intercourse with people, whether in a high rank of life or in a low: inspiring the respect of the one and the confidence of the other. In conversation he was frank and straightforward, and though he avoided contentions, he never disguised his thoughts or opinions. There was no affectation of any kind about him; self-love being non-existent, he went straight to God and saw his neighbour in him. And this made approach to him so easy.

Even his tastes partook of the same simplicity. Modern inventions which, under the pretext of being improvements, substituted complex devices for the simpler mechanism of a less artificial age, were obnoxious to him. A false door was a veritable eyesore to him. Exaggerations of any kind, moreover, displeased him.

The Abbé Galeran wrote as follows about Père Pernet: "I have come in contact with many souls, possessed of various degrees of sanctity, in my ministry of close on fifty years, and I can affirm that I never came across a more candid and single-minded soul than that of Étienne Pernet. He had a striking mixture of great simplicity and quickness of apprehension, as well as of force of penetration. . . . His great and unceasing care was to correspond with the movements of grace; attentive to the smallest indication of the divine Will, he allowed himself to be led in whatever direction it called

him. Never did he draw back from a sacrifice which God asked of him, nor seek the gratification of self-love. Grace found in him a docile instrument ever ready to submit with generosity to the call of God. In the path of perfection, his was ever an upward progress.

“Here are some characteristic features of this holy soul in the days when I came more immediately under his influence. Who would have guessed in those days that God was working in his soul, and forming it, in order that it should be the soul of the founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption! He himself—the gentle and timid Pernet—had he the smallest suspicion of the designs God had upon him? Assuredly not. But in his admirable simplicity he was prepared to do all that God pleased, remaining perfectly indifferent to the life, or form of ministry, to which he destined him. What I have here written is the résumé of talks with my master and friend, in which he imparted many golden treasures of wisdom, the value and importance of which I only fully appreciated in later years.

“He had mastered the secret of the art to which our guides in the mystical life have given the name of the knowledge of ‘how to hold intercourse with God.’ He seemed held by the hand, while he followed alone an invisible leader who guided him in the paths of prayer. He said to me one day: ‘There are some privileged souls who stretch out their wings and soar very high; as for me I am one of those who stick to the earth; I find my God and my Saviour there where he has placed himself so as to be within my reach. Instead of climbing, I descend, since Jesus Christ has deigned to humble himself to my lowly level by becoming man. But when I say I descend, I do so only by a figure of speech, as

when I find myself in the presence of my God made man, I cannot fail to be raised up. Nothing ravishes my heart more than the words of St John, "That which we have preached to you we have heard, we have seen, we have touched with our hands." That is true wisdom: to know Jesus Christ; the Jesus Christ of the gospels, such as it has pleased him to reveal himself to us, and not an imaginary one. What made for the destruction of the Jews was that they expected a Messiah of their own imagining. . . . And how many heretics have fallen into error because they would not bow before the Christ of the gospels.'

"The date of these reflections of Étienne Pernet goes back a long way; he was not then a priest. I have read them more than once since I jotted them down in my note-book; and I owe this to these thoughts, that I have tried all my life, as far as I was able, to preach simply the Jesus Christ of the gospels.

"Étienne Pernet was a constant reader of the *Following of Christ*. His favourite chapter of all contained in that incomparable book was the one entitled *De familiari amicitia Jesu* (Bk. II, c. viii). He knew the chapter by heart, and he encouraged me to learn it at the rate of three verses a day. He has written a little commentary on it, one which was practical, lucid, and full of unction, and which was a fresh revelation of a soul which, in truth, lived in familiarity with his God.

"The Little Sisters of the Assumption appreciate the great virtues of their Father; they have seen them unfolding from day to day. I have in some sense assisted at their formation. I have observed the workings of grace in him at close quarters, with the curiosity of a child, without at the time taking into account what

I was doing. To-day, as I search through these hurried notes, now almost illegible, I discover the source (little suspected at the time) whence I have drawn wise counsels which have strengthened and supported me in the trials of life."

There was another virtue, that of poverty, which he, to whom the title of the Father of the Poor could have been justly applied, practised in its perfection.

His heart, all his life long, had been utterly detached from earthly possessions. A faithful servant of Jesus Christ, he "sought first the kingdom of God and his justice," at the price of every sacrifice.

The revered founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption went through all the trials of extreme poverty in establishing that work in the face of all the heavy charges which its development imposed upon him. He became a beggar in behalf of his daughters, and received gladly the smallest sum, even a single franc, in their behalf.

He wrote on one occasion to Mother Marie de Jésus: "We are indeed very poor at this moment. I am asking for *bread*, but my efforts during the last few days have not had any result. . . . But, if what this poor young woman says is true (as it appears to me it is), she and her family are a hundred times more to be pitied than we are. In the event that you judge it well to help her, after having heard her story, do what you can for her. In money I should advise you to give her no more than two francs. Our Lord will accept this offering of your poverty. You must be prudent, seeing that she has no proof of her sad condition; notwithstanding this I recommend her to your charity and to your heart."

On another occasion he writes: "Your poverty goes

to my heart. Alas, my purse is empty this evening like yours! Courage, nevertheless; let us pray to-night to Mary and St Joseph; to-morrow Jesus will send us bread, and I hope for the pleasure of bringing it myself to you."

The Father carried out the virtue of poverty to its minutest details, by example as well as by precept. He never wasted a match, a bit of string or a scrap of paper. He disliked extremely being given anything a little better, in the way of food, than what was given to the other members of the community, when he was suffering from his fatigues, saying: "You are not treating me as a religious, the poor cannot afford such things." And he was heard to complain that he, a religious, had all the necessities of life, whereas many poor people were without bread. He was very careful of his clothes, and used to remonstrate strongly when it was thought necessary to renew them before he considered them quite worn out. And yet, if he had not been looked after he would have been short of what was strictly necessary, as he was accustomed to put all he owned at the disposition of anyone in want.

A faithful observer of the Rule, he never carried any money in his purse except a few sous which he required for buses. When he required money for a journey, he gave an account of it directly he returned to his convent. If, however, the Father practised holy poverty and recommended it to his daughters, he thought nothing too good or too beautiful for our Lord. "Poverty for us," he used to say, "riches for all that concerns the divine worship."

He had a great sense of beauty and harmony of lines—be it said in passing—and he often surprised people by

his knowledge and taste in the fine arts: pictures, architecture and music. Modern realism made no appeal to him, and in this he did not belong to the age he lived in.

In the beginning of May, 1895, Père Pernet had to submit to a second operation for cataract. For many days afterwards he was kept in complete obscurity. When beginning to go about again he thought he heard water flowing whilst walking in the garden. His sight was still far from restored, and, fearing a great loss of water, he struggled to reach the spot from whence the sound proceeded in order to turn off the tap. In doing so he missed his foothold and fell heavily, and in the fall broke his leg. His instinctive love of poverty—for such it was—led to an accident, therefore, which confined him to his couch for three months.

Père Pernet had all the virtues which mark a true religious in an eminent degree. The life of his soul, which was one with God and all for God, manifested itself even outwardly. To quote once more the testimony of the Abbé Galeran: "I can say unhesitatingly, from my own conviction founded on facts and from Étienne's Pernet's own admission, that he died without ever having lost his baptismal innocence. . . . All Père Pernet's pupils looked upon him as a model of every virtue. I could say of him what has been said of Père d'Alzon (of whom also it is told that he had never committed a grievous sin), that it was impossible to come in intimate contact with him without being conscious of the atmosphere of innocence and purity which surrounded him—in the same way that one could not approach an orange tree in flower without breathing its perfume. His purity of soul was reflected on his

countenance. . . . Étienne Pernet, whilst he was still a layman, asked me to accompany him on a holiday to St Gervasy, which is not far from Nîmes. The object of our expedition was to make the Stations of the Cross on the holy hill which dominates the monument of St Benizet. The conversation on the way turned on religious subjects, and the following avowal escaped his lips in an unguarded moment: 'I cannot form the idea of the exact state of a soul separated from God by mortal sin, as thanks to him I don't think I have ever had that misfortune. I am very far, however, from loving God as I should, or as he wishes us to love him. It seems to me that if I committed a mortal sin, if I had the feeling of horror that the thought of it gives me at this moment, it would be sufficient to make me die of grief. God is so good; I trust he will never allow me to separate myself from him even for a single moment.'

"After saying this, he changed the conversation abruptly, as if he had been led into saying more than he intended. He had said enough, however, to unveil the beauty of his soul, and though I was but a lad the impression I derived from what he said was vivid and enduring. Later on I gave an account to Père d'Alzon of this memorable interview, and he forbade me to speak of it. This is the first time I have done so, and I mention it now for the consolation of the daughters of Père Pernet, and in order to bring to light their Father's virtues."

Mortification took a great place in Père Pernet's life. The religious who occupied cells in his vicinity used to hear him taking the discipline daily, and with much severity, before retiring to rest. He often made novenas

of penitential exercises when he wished to obtain particular graces, or for the conversion of sinners. It was constantly noticed how ingenious he was in mortifying himself even on the smallest occasions, and in the slightest details. This holy disposition of his soul, which was ever alert to obey the movements of grace, showed itself in him at a very early age.

The Abbé Galeran, whose acquaintance with him dated, as we have already said, from his early days, lays special stress on Père Pernet's spirit of mortification: "Though he carefully hid his mortifications I have on more than one occasion surprised him in the exercise of penances which he imposed upon himself. There was something in the choice he made of such practices which not only edified me but filled me with admiration. Those who knew him well will understand what I say. Under an appearance of gentleness and suavity, he hid a great deal of energy, and a firmness which rivalled his kindness of heart. I will not dwell on his disciplines, his fasts, his long prayers, said on his knees on icy-cold marble flags; or even of a hair shirt, fashioned by the Carmelites of Nîmes (he dared to have one made for me!). All these things may be found in the lives of those servants of God who have risen above the rank and file of his followers. What I should like to draw attention to is the ingenuity, the refinement of imagination, which Étienne Pernet brought to bear on his austerities.

"The following is an example of my meaning:

"I was still a student at the College of the Assumption when my master and friend, on the occasion of a whole holiday, invited me to go for a long walk with him. I gladly agreed. We sallied forth on the road to St Gilles, which is a good deal beyond the village of

Cassargues. It was midsummer; the roads were dry and dusty, as they commonly are in the south of France at that time of year; the sun shone, burning and implacable, from a cloudless sky, the air was filled with the shrill cry of grasshoppers. After a good hour's tramp, we became devoured with thirst: such a thirst that we should have been prepared to quench it even in the muddy waters of the Vistre if we had not been miles away from it. We looked in all directions, but not a sign of water was to be seen. At last we spied a group of willows in the distance, to the right of the road, which gave hopes of running water. On reaching the spot we found what was even better, a spring between two trees whence gushed forth, from under a stone, an abundance of pure, limpid water. Naturally, I precipitated myself on to the ground beside it with the intention of quenching my thirst. Étienne Pernet stopped me, seizing me by the arm, and saying, 'Henri, the occasion is too good not to profit by it.' 'What do you mean?' I answered. 'What I mean is that you and I, being devoured with thirst, have been given an enviable opportunity, by a sacrifice, of helping the souls in purgatory. Thirst is one of their torments. Let us wash our hands, therefore, in the water, but refrain from drinking a drop to staunch our thirst in union with our Saviour's thirst on the Cross.'

"Who could resist words such as these, which were uttered with so much fervour, and came from such a loving and compassionate heart? I own that in turning away from the spring I cast envious eyes back upon it, but my holy and revered friend carried the day. I was under his influence—never have I met in anyone else such a combination of *suaviter et fortiter*.

Is it possible to give greater proof of strength of character than that shown by Père Pernet in this little incident? Many times when preaching, and giving retreats, I have recalled it, and it has never failed to make an impression on those who heard it. To be devoured with thirst under a broiling sun, to find a spring in which one washed one's hands, but did not taste a single drop, to leave it still bearing the torment of thirst without having had it quenched: it required an Étienne Pernet to imagine—and perform—such a genuine act of mortification.”

This same spirit of penance was the cause of the unalterable patience with which Père Pernet endured his many sufferings: for instance, the pain caused by the repeated operations on his eyes, and the trial of being laid up for months after his leg was broken. Never did he utter a word of complaint, and never did he lose a serenity of mind and gaiety which softened the pain of seeing him suffer to those who had the care of him. And what an example he gave in those constant mortifications of every moment to which we give the name of “duty,” and which the Father called the “day's burden.” He recoiled from none; he surmounted fatigue, habitual weariness consequent on bad health, to go off to the right, to the left, to preside at meetings, to preach retreats, to hear confessions, etc. The day's programme was a long one. For him the “day's burden” was wellnigh crushing.

Whence did he draw this force and courage if not in the zeal with which he was fired for the salvation of souls? He had not that mistakenly conceived humility, Père Emmanuel Bailly once said, which paralyses and condemns a soul to inaction, and which seems almost to

call the mercy of God in question. He used to say: "We are nothing, but 'we can do all things in him who strengthens us,'" and these were words which he frequently repeated. The thought that the grace of God was with him—leading him—stimulated and inflamed him. "There is good, great good to be done," he was accustomed to say, "and though we can do nothing, are worth nothing, we must go to the help of souls, because God so wills." Thus he never wished the word *rest* mentioned. It was a saying of St Vincent de Paul's that a priest should never repose. The same thing could be said of the saintly Père Pernet, that his apostolic heart never allowed him to take repose.

Yet, in spite of the numerous good works which Père Pernet started, urged by his zeal for God's glory, it seemed to him that he had done nothing, and faced by the ever-increasing progress of sin and evil, he used to cry out, "What can we do for our good God? My children, my children, let us become saints. It is only the saints who can do anything."

One of his brethren in religion says that up to the last, in spite of his age and infirmities, the Father used to take Holy Communion to the sick he looked after, and it was necessary to insist—to do violence almost to him—to help, or accompany him, even when the weakening of his eyesight had made it a risk for him to go alone. And on such occasions his gratitude was unmeasured for slight services gladly rendered, and which were, from every point of view, his due.

A religious of the Order of the Assumption writes thus of him: "In my opinion Père Pernet was the most perfect type of the soul of the Assumptionist united to God. We saw in him a zeal as indefatigable as it was

humble, a continual mortification hidden under a smile, a scrupulous observance of the Rule combined with perfect charity towards his brethren, above all continual prayer, which made his life a constant communication with God. It followed, therefore, that his words were an echo of this divine conversation, and his works were a continuation of the works of the Master.”

CHAPTER XIV

Perfection consists in accepting all that comes to us, joys, pains, or sorrows, for the Love of God.—ST VINCENT DE PAUL.

PÈRE PERNET had to make vigorous efforts in order not to allow himself to be drawn into making promises to start new foundations. Pressing invitations to do so came from all quarters, and it was impossible for him to respond to them. As we have already said, this was an incessantly renewed trial to the founder, and he took occasion from it to remind his daughters of the humility they should feel in seeing how little good they could do in comparison with what there was to be done. Nothing would have induced him, on the other hand, to sacrifice the religious formation in the souls of those who, many in number, joined the Congregation. He understood too well the necessity of those precious years of training in the solitude of the novitiate to wish to abridge them by a day.

Each clothing was an occasion of real joy to him, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than the growing number of novices. He never missed coming once a week to say Mass in their chapel, and to make himself acquainted with the progress they were making in their

studies. How he loved to speak to them about the greatness of their vocation, and to encourage them in the difficulties they would have to overcome, and the sacrifices they would have to make, at the beginning of their life of self-renunciation !

At the urgent request of H.E. Cardinal Coullie, Archbishop of Lyons, a fourth foundation was made in his diocese at Oullin in 1895.

It was now thirty years since the revered founder had executed God's orders in trying to carry out the inspiration he received from him to work for the salvation of the poor. He longed, therefore, to get his work crowned by obtaining for it the definite approbation of the Holy See. The Father received the conviction when God restored him to life and health in 1890 that he did so to this end, therefore, that he was bound to achieve it. From that time he never ceased praying and getting prayers said for this intention. He then waited till it should please God to manifest his will to him.

On January 29, 1896, Père Picard suddenly proposed to Père Pernet to go to Rome with Père Emmanuel Bailly, the Procurator-General of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption to the Holy See, who was returning to Rome on the following day.

The Father agreed, and prepared to start; asking himself at the same time whether it was in truth he who had been invited. On the day of his departure, he owned that he thought he was dreaming, and he said to his daughters: "I am going to Rome. Yesterday morning there was no question of it; even last evening it was undecided. Consequently I am led to believe that

it is by God's permission, and that it is more than by his permission; that it is his will. I go to Rome, then, not to take a holiday; not to make pilgrimages but to accomplish God's will, and to treat on the important interests of your little religious family. You must ask of God that his glory and your affairs may not suffer by my incapacity."

He left the same evening under the watchful care of Père Emmanuel Bailly, who, not only during the journey, but during the six weeks he spent in Rome, showed himself a true Raphael to the holy founder. He even tried to obtain, through the intercession of Pius IX, the recovery of the sight of this second Tobias, by frequently escorting him to the tomb of that holy Pope. And the prayers offered up there were not fruitless, for though Père Pernet never recovered his eyesight, the disease was completely arrested, so that the total blindness with which—according to the oculists—he was threatened, never materialised, and he was able to say Mass and recite the divine Office to the end of his life.

On February 2, the day after his arrival, the community at Grenelle received this letter from him:

"I assisted at the Pope's private Mass this morning at 8 o'clock. I prayed hard in union with him for you and all our works. How can I describe to you all the feelings and thoughts which filled me during that Mass? I saw the man of God and the representative of the whole world, the Vicar of our Lord. And at the same time I saw our Lord immolating himself beneath his hands, and by his hands, and continuing his sacrifice on Mount Calvary and accomplishing his work as mediator between heaven and earth, between his Father and us."

The following letter from a member of the Society

of Jesus throws light on the same circumstance: "I was in Rome during the months of January and February, 1896. I had obtained the favour of assisting at Pope Leo XIII's Mass on the feast of the Purification, and I recognised the venerable form of Père Pernet in the narrow precincts of the chapel. The holy old man appeared deeply impressed by the celebration. His attitude, fixed and motionless, bore testimony to his ardent reverence and faith. His eyes never wandered from the altar where the Pope was celebrating. A ceremony, which is annually renewed, took place the same day in the throne-room; it consists in offering a candle to the Pope. This honour is reserved for the superiors of all the religious Orders who have houses in Rome. The favour is given to each superior to choose someone to accompany him. The companion carries the candle, and the two are presented together in the room where the Pope holds his audience. I was present at this reception where I again met Père Pernet, Père Bailly having taken him to carry his candle. The founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption had spent the whole day at St Peter's and the Vatican, immersed in those profound emotions which these sacred spots evoke in the soul of the priest. I remarked during this ceremony how deep was his recollection. He appeared unconscious of the crowd; all he saw was the Pope."

Père Pernet, writing on the subject of his interview with the Pope, says:

"The Holy Father answers with as much patience as kindness all that is asked of him. Père Bailly, having said a few words on behalf of Père Picard, asked the Pope to bless the Order of the Assumption and all its works.

Then, pointing to me, he added: 'Also, specially, those which the Father who accompanies me has founded and directed during thirty years.' "

"The Pope," wrote Père Bailly, "with a great expression of kindness answered, 'Yes, I bless them,' and he made a large sign of the cross over both of us, slowly and most benignly; then he gave us his hand to kiss.

"Père Pernet, encouraged by this kind reception, approached a little nearer, and again took his Holiness's hand, and having kissed it, said in a loud tone of voice:

" 'Most holy Father, I am indeed your son, and I beg of you to bless all my intentions.' "

"Then," to quote from Père Pernet's letter to the Little Sisters, "the Pope smiled, and looking at me fixedly said:

" 'Be it so, I bless all your intentions.' "

But this was not all; there were, later on, other causes for rejoicing. On February 7 he wrote to his daughters:

"May our Lord be with us all. May his grace unite us closely to him, so that we may be truly his in transforming ourselves wholly into his likeness. Let us neglect no means of meriting this grace, especially at this moment. If you continue to pray, I confidently hope that my journey to Rome will not be unprofitable, and that it will be a starting-point of a development in our little Congregation which will lead to its full expansion in the Church of God. Let us hope, therefore; but let us be humble. Rome is very much changed in appearance since 1870. I hardly recognise it; it is quite modernised. . . . Rome is no longer the Pope's capital, alas! but, nevertheless, she remains queen of the world inasmuch as she is still the head, the heart,

and the centre of Catholicity. We have been through the greater part of the palace of the Vatican. We have visited several of the immense statue and picture galleries, which are full of masterpieces of art. From the Vatican we passed into the gardens which surround it. We went to pray at the Grotto of Lourdes where the Pope often goes to pray.

"Whilst thinking that our Pope, Leo XIII, is a prisoner amidst all these splendours—the captive of Jesus Christ—I almost consoled myself with the consideration that this prison, the jailors of which are freemasons and revolutionaries, is still none the less the centre of the truth which enlightens the nations in these and all ages. The Pope, captive as he is, nevertheless acts as the lighthouse of our faith. How grand and consoling this is! and how it inspires us with hope for the future, which belongs—under God—to his Vicar and his Church."

A week later, seeing that his stay in Rome would have to be prolonged, he writes: "We French people are always in a hurry. We like to eat the egg before it is laid, as the saying has it. That is unreasonable. In Rome, where God manages the affairs of his Church, they are wiser; they wait for the right moment to act. Like your Father, therefore, you will not allow yourselves to be moved by your eagerness, and together we will have patience."

On March 10 he gives an account of a most consoling audience he had had with the Pope, in company with Père Picard and Père Bailly, on the previous day:

"Père Picard spoke of me to his Holiness as one of the five of the first religious of the Congregation of the Assumptionists; as a companion of the founder, and

who had counted nearly fifty years of religious life. The Pope appeared pleased, if not surprised, and—taking a certain interest in my insignificant person—said with much solicitude: ‘Have you, then, good health? Do you suffer at all?’ I answered: ‘I have tolerable health, Holy Father, but for my eyes, which give me trouble.’ All this time I was on my knees before the Pope, holding his hand.”

Then the conversation turned on the Little Sisters, and Père Bailly describes it as follows: “Père Picard told the Pope that Père Pernet had founded the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and gave a short account of the origin and object of the work. The Pope was keenly interested in it. He asked if they took vows; if they wore a religious habit; if they lived in community. Père Picard and Père Pernet answered these questions in turn. The Pope asked if they had made any foundations in England, and Père Pernet answered in the affirmative, and told him of the communities which had settled there. Also, that they had spread to Ireland, and New York. The Pope seemed quite astonished, and repeated, ‘New York! New York!’ several times.

“Père Picard then continued, saying that Père Pernet had come to present his children for baptism.

“‘And how many are they?’ asked the Pope.

“‘They are about four hundred in number.’

“‘Four hundred!’ exclaimed the Pope. ‘And when were they born?’

“‘Thirty years ago.’

“‘Oh, if that is the case,’ said the Pope with a smile, ‘they may well be presented: they may be baptised. They have been born sufficiently long.’

“Père Pernet took courage then to give an account

of the results of their apostolate among the poor. Père Picard mentioned some of the facts, and I some others. We two were on each side of the Holy Father, and Père Pernet was kneeling in front of him. We told him the number of the families who had been brought back to the Church; of the conversions—three hundred per month in number—recorded during the last year; and so forth. The Pope, whilst listening to this cross-fire of information of the marvellous results obtained by the Little Sisters, was more and more astonished. He raised his eyes to heaven, stretched out his arms, and for a moment or two kept silence, as if seized with admiration for this fruitful apostleship.”

“The Pope,” Père Pernet adds, “opened his arms wide, as if to press the Little Sisters to his heart. Still holding his Holiness’s hand in mine, I hardened my heart, and said: ‘Holy Father, if I dared I would ask a favour of you.’ And I looked at Père Picard, asking him by my look to encourage me. ‘Père Picard protects you, and I give you my blessing—what else do you want?’ asked the Pope. I ought certainly to have been satisfied, both as a religious and as your Father, but I went still further.

“ ‘Very Holy Father, I should like your Holiness to accord me the favour of giving the Papal Benediction to all my children, to the *Dames Servantes des Pauvres*, to our workmen belonging to the Fraternity, to the Daughters of St Monica; in short, to the various groups of confraternities associated with the work.’ (I was not aware at the time that I was asking for a favour which the Pope seldom grants.) The Pope, however, answered me with a smile and kindness which I shall never forget:

“ ‘Yes, I grant you the grace of giving the Apostolic

Blessing, once only, to all your houses, and for the divers groups of your works.' I felt there was nothing else for me to ask for. I was filled with joy.

"The audience then concluded. The Holy Father again blessed us all before we took leave of him.

"All that remains for us to do now is to get our approval, and to establish ourselves in Rome close to the Holy Father, and to work amongst the sick and the poor who are not wanting around the Vatican. All this we shall accomplish if we go on praying, and we do not make ourselves undeserving of these graces by our want of fidelity to our vocation in our religious life. I have great confidence in our Lord that this will come about, and great faith in the future which he is reserving for us."

Père Pernet made the most of the time he spent in Rome, and the steps he took were crowned with success. People shared the Pope's surprise that he had waited so long before applying for approbation of his work. Accordingly, he had the satisfaction of being told that, owing to the experience gained in those years, and the letters and testimonials received from the archbishops and bishops of the different dioceses in which foundations had been made, he would soon obtain the favour he asked for. The venerable founder, pleading his advanced age, expressed the desire that the petition should soon be granted, saying: "I have not much longer to live."

His appearance was still so vigorous and active that this remark provoked a smile; but at the same time he was given the assurance that the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption was so loved and appreciated that he would not have long to wait to hear it recognised.

The Father rejoiced exceedingly at the good news. He was able to leave Rome about March 18, after having had the consolation of saying Mass at the altar of the Chair of St Peter, behind the Confession of the Holy Apostles. Before his departure he had an interview with H.E. Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli, who was the Cardinal-Protector of the Order of the Augustinians of the Assumption, and who was soon afterwards to be that of the Little Sisters, and from whom he received the assurance of the profound esteem he had for the work of the Little Sisters and for their founder.

Père Pernet stopped at Lyons on his return in order to visit the houses there belonging to the Congregation; and, assembling the different branches of the work, he had the joy of imparting for the first time to them the Papal Benediction for which he had pleaded with such fervour and earnestness. He might have asked, no doubt, for some other privilege for the religious congregation of which he was the founder; for instance, for a particular indulgence, for some spiritual favour which might have been a perpetual possession. Not so. The soul of this true son of the Church, kneeling before the Sovereign Pontiff, was so moved to its depths that he could only form one aspiration—namely that of transmitting this Benediction to his daughters and to all those whom they attained by their apostleship. A true religious of the Assumption, his heart was on fire with three inseparable loves: for our Lord, for the most holy Virgin and for the Church. For him the blessing of Leo XIII was the blessing of Jesus Christ himself upon the well-beloved family of which he was the Father and founder. Accordingly, every time he was enabled to communicate this favour to the different houses at

CONVENTS OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION.



1. CHESTER.

2. NORWICH.

3. BIRMINGHAM.

the meetings of the members of the divers confraternities, he did so with ever-renewed joy.

Meanwhile the promises made to Père Pernet were being fulfilled in Rome as regards the enquiries into their constitutions with a view to their approbation. A member of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars said of them: "Their constitutions were in their hearts before they were put on paper." The Little Sisters had lived up to them from the beginning, so that when they were presented, it was not necessary to make them, but only to write them; there could not be a finer tribute to the founder and the institute.

The Little Sisters meanwhile multiplied their prayers and intentions for the success of this important matter. Sacrifices were also asked of them. The unexpected death of one of the most fervent novices in the first year of her religious life was of such a nature. Young, and, to all appearances, with a long life before her, she was gathered after twelve days' illness. She left behind her in her eleven months' training an example full of edification. Whilst generously sacrificing the longing desire she had to devote herself to the apostolic life, she was heard to exclaim very shortly before her death, when looking at the rooms on the fifth floor of the workmen's house, visible from the infirmary window: "Possibly there is a Little Sister in that garret. It is there I should have wished to go, and indeed to the ends of the earth, so that I could make our Lord and my religious family known."

Her last words were those of her religious vows, when, according to the formula, she gave herself *in æternum* to her heavenly Spouse, and went to add to the number of the Little Sisters in heaven who protect their Sisters on earth.

Père Pernet, who was at St Étienne, wrote at once to Grenelle:

“I say to our good God with you, and as you do, ‘My Father, not my will but thine be done, to-day, and always, and in all things.’ Yet what a loss, and what a sorrow is this! I shall no longer find this sweet and perfect flower, Marie Lucie, in our *parterre*. As you say, our Lord has plucked it in order to transplant it into his paradise. . . . I will say Mass to-morrow for the dear child, who, from being the betrothed has become the spouse of him who has so early robbed us of her, before we were able to satisfy our longing to crown the betrothal with the wreath and robe of the spouse. I have suffered doubly from not having been with you in those moments of sorrow and separation.

“May the adorable and most loving Master our Lord Jesus Christ be a thousand times blessed that it pleased him to call Marie Lucie to himself, and to say to her: ‘Come, spouse of Christ, and receive the crown which God has prepared for you from all eternity.’ And we say Amen, Amen.”

On April 10, 1896, Père Pernet, hearing that Cardinal Richard was starting for Rome, called upon him in order to ask him to recommend the Little Sisters once more to the Pope’s benevolent notice. His Eminence had received the decree the previous evening, and he now placed it in the founder’s hands.

The Father announced the news to the Congregation in the following terms:

“My very dear children, our good God has poured blessings abundantly on our little religious family since it was begun. His paternal hand has never ceased guiding and sustaining us up to this moment; but the

greatest favour we have received from him is the one which came from Rome on Saturday, the 10th of this month, through the medium of H.E. Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris. The laudative Brief which establishes us in the Universal Church is as complete and far-reaching as we could possibly desire. It not only comprehends our religious family but all the rest of our good works, which are named and designated in it as well.

“Let us rejoice, then, in the Lord, and let this joy be to all of us the cause of a greater fidelity to our duties in our religious life, and the source of a greater and more holy zeal in our work for souls.”

Père Pernet announced the good news at the mother-house of the Little Sisters on Palm Sunday.

“Accordingly you are now founded,” he said to them; “may our good God therefore call me to himself as soon as it pleases him. To-day is the day of joy, the day of palms, the day of triumph. Let it be truly the day of the Lord, because we will renew ourselves in the love of this good and divine Master, and at the same time in our love of the Congregation.”

Then he asked all those who were present to go at once with him to the chapel and there, with a voice which betrayed all the deep gratitude which filled his heart, he intoned the *Te Deum*, which the Sisters continued in the same spirit of thanksgiving.

A special feast was celebrated in every house in the Order on the occasion of this great favour having been bestowed upon it. The Father opened the celebration with the following words, in which are contained the paramount wishes of the founder for his daughters the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and therefore which we may be pardoned for giving without curtailment:

“*Deo gratias*, my dear children. The feast we are keeping to-day, which we have awaited so long, fills us all with a legitimate joy, and brings with it the grounds of all our hopes for the future. You may henceforth be able to say of your Congregation, *Haec est domus Domini*, she is the house of the Lord; *firmiter aedificata*, solidly built; *bene fundata est*, for her foundations are firm; *super firmam petram*, on the solid rock.

“The rock is our Lord Jesus Christ; the rock is the apostle St Peter; it is Rome—the Pope, the Vicar of Christ; and you are now laid, founded, on the indestructible rock upon which, once an edifice is built, it is secure for eternity. To construct—to attempt to construct—outside the Church of God, and upon any foundation except on Jesus Christ, is to build on sand. We desire a life for you which will last not for a life’s duration only, but for an eternal life, and now and henceforth, if you will it, you have the assurance of it. You are now under the ægis of the Vicar of Jesus Christ; you have your place in the Church of God; it depends upon you now to maintain yourselves in it, to guard it in order to live in it and by it, and to go on developing. But three things are necessary to you in order that you may attain this desirable result.

“1. A faith which, ever increasing in ardour and purity, will go on increasing from day to day, and which will raise you above all human and natural considerations—above all that passes away—in order that you may establish your views, your projects, your hopes in God. Abide for ever and to the end in the Church’s teachings; put your faith in them. May your minds to-day, and to-morrow, and always be docile to all the Church asks of you in the order of truth; and this in all

succeeding generations as long as your religious family exists.

“2. Give not only your faith but your heart’s affections, a filial submission, and a sincere, loyal, and entire assent of the will, and an unlimited obedience to all the Church asks of you, because our Lord said to his apostles: ‘Whosoever heareth you heareth me, and he who despiseth you despiseth me.’ And let not this submission be restricted to the Church’s commands, but given ever to the slightest intimation of her wishes.

“3. Finally you will be faithful to your constitutions, so that you may live and be firmly established on the foundation-stone which is to you the support and means of salvation; you will neither add to them nor take away from them unless a cause should arise, and then under the direction of the Church herself. And you will make it a matter of conscience to put your rules in practice each day, and will do so in a filial spirit, such as befits well brought-up children in a family which is that of God. And at the same time that you will have your place in the Church, you will have a more assured, a better defined and greater place in the noble family of the Assumption, and whilst you will hold it in honour, you will do your utmost to be to it a source of joy.

“I have nothing more to add except to sing, *Deo gratias*, Let us give thanks to God.”

The Little Sisters established a foundation in April of the same year (1897) at Lille, where they received a paternal welcome from Mgr. Sonnois, Bishop of Cambrai. Another little detachment started in the following September for Ireland, having been invited by benefactors to settle at Kingstown, a seaport town

within a short distance of Dublin. This second house in Catholic Ireland, where the poor are so numerous, rejoiced the holy founder's heart greatly.

Cardinal Rampolla announced to the Superior-General of the Little Sisters of the Assumption at the end of January, 1898, that in answer to his letter asking the favour of a Cardinal-Protector for her institute, Leo XIII had granted his request, and named Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli for that office.

This was a great joy for the whole Congregation, and the Little Sisters had the pleasure of expressing it in the filial reception they gave to that eminent prelate at a visit he made them in the month of August of the same year. Cardinal Vannutelli was only passing through Paris, and made but a short stay there, but he found time to honour the Little Sisters at the mother-house with a visit, and said Mass in their chapel. In return for this favour, they did the utmost that their poverty permitted of to make this reception solemn and imposing. After the celebration of the holy Sacrifice, for which the sanctuary was brilliantly illuminated, his Eminence passed into the *chapelle des œuvres*, and knelt, and prayed there at the tomb of the humble foundress, Mother Marie de Jésus.

The Cardinal was afterwards received by the nuns assembled in the community-room, where, in response to the warmly expressed words of greeting which he received from them, with their assurance of the confidence with which his powerful and paternal protection inspired them, he made the following reply:

“ My very dear daughters, I know of many charitable works in France; I have been visiting some of them in the last few days; I have been very much struck and

moreover edified by them. But I have been profoundly touched by my visit to this house. Your charity is indeed deep, all-pervading, touching; it is truly the charity of which the apostle St Paul speaks. And if you are 'little' in name, you are great in your works. Your institute, if it is, as you say, my Benjamin, has a right to all my affection. Yes, I am glad to be your Protector, and I shall do my best to be of assistance to you with the Holy Father. I shall speak to him about you; he shall hear from my mouth how much you love him, and of all the good done by your institute." . . . He ended by giving them the Pope's blessing.

The Father was much touched by the proceedings, and after the Cardinal's departure he gave thanks to God; and, recalling all the events which had succeeded each other since the foundation of his religious family, and the numerous trials endured by the holy foundress for the increase and good of this work, now so visibly blessed by God, he said:

"Our Lord owes us nothing, but one may dare to look back, and see what the favours of this year have cost us in the shape of trials, anguish, and sufferings in the past."

CHAPTER XV

Extreme Unction does not try, like poor human love, to dull our senses to pain, but to strengthen them for the perfect holocaust of death.

MGR. DIZIER, Bishop of Amiens, received the Little Sisters of the Assumption into his episcopal city in the month of May, 1898, and gave his paternal blessing to the foundation, which a generous benefactor had enabled them to make. In July following Père Pernet had the satisfaction of seeing his daughters established in the parish of St Ambrose in Paris. In this foundation he realised one of his cherished dreams. He had always longed to see the Little Sisters exercise their apostolic mission in this populous quarter of the city, as he foresaw the immensity of the good they could do there amongst the members of the working class.

He wrote on November 3 from St Étienne: "I find here, as I have already perceived at Nîmes, and at Perpignan from whence I come, that our works are really an extension of those of the mother-house. They have the same spirit, and are all of a nature to maintain union and unity, and to sustain the courage of all. . . . I expect to find similar consolation at Lyons. The words of our Lord to his disciples when he looked around him have just come to my mind: 'Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and see the countries, they are white for the harvest.' . . . 'Pray that the Master of the harvest may send forth labourers to his harvest.' And when I look about, and take into account the amount of good done to souls, and the facility with which it is

done every day, wherever you are, by your feeble hands, I cannot help exclaiming with the divine Master, The fields are ready, the harvest is ripe—pray that labourers may be multiplied.”

His prayer was heard. Vocations, from the time the blessings and favours arrived from Rome, increased in number so rapidly that the novitiate-house could scarcely contain them. The holy founder rejoiced and gave thanks continually to God for it. At every ceremony of clothing he foresaw all the good of which these vocations gave promise in the future; and of the means they would give to the Congregation of complying with the invitations which they were receiving of making foundations at Le Teil, Nevers, Rheims, and for Cork in Ireland. But Père Pernet, with the exception of the house at Roanne which was founded in 1899, was never again to give his blessing to a band of Little Sisters starting to make a new foundation. There was nothing to make anyone foresee that the end was so near. Yet, on various occasions, Père Pernet was heard to make remarks such as these: “My time is nearly up . . . I shall not be much longer with you.” “Take to heart what I say to you . . . soon I shall no longer be here.”

He said to several of his daughters when visiting the houses: “This is the last time I shall see you.” Or he spoke to them as people speak at a last interview. To one amongst others, a Sister who is now in Ireland, he said on his last journey: “My time is up; I shall probably never see you again in this world. I give you this piece of advice for your whole life.”

Those who came in contact with him during the last months of his life were struck with his expression in speaking of the happiness of heaven for which he

could not conceal his longing. He consecrated more time than ever to prayer, and his fervour in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament struck everyone who witnessed it.

A member of the Confraternity of the *Dames Servantes* wrote as follows about him: "Père Pernet's ever-increasing sanctity made one fear and foresee his approaching end. He passed long hours at the feet of our Lord, and it was easy to see that his soul—detached from all earthly things—would soon break its bonds, and take flight to him for whom he said he hungered and thirsted. He lived already in heaven, and only the possibility of doing an act of charity, or giving some good advice, brought down his thoughts to earthly interests and concerns."

The holy founder spoke to his daughters on January 1, 1899, in the following terms:

"Let me, my very dear children, convey to you an impression which I received at a very early hour this morning. Before five o'clock this morning, whilst the door was still closed at our chapel in the Rue François I^{er}, there had assembled a crowd of beggars; poor people, who waited, shelterless, under a beating storm of rain and sleet, till the doors should be opened that they might receive a scanty alms from the faithful who came to Mass, for the alleviation of their misery. I am still moved with compassion when I think of the sight, and I said to myself: 'What have we done for our merciful God to have preserved us from this extreme poverty and necessity?' When one is witness of such misery, one understands better the tender love of our Lord for the poor. Oh, let us love the poor, the down-trodden, the ignorant! Let us *respect* them, and may

this be ever one of the leading characteristics of our religious family.

“ Since you belong to them by your vows, my children, learn how to enter into their trials. Is not the true dignity that of our Saviour, who stooped to their level and made himself the prop and support of all in suffering, and of all who are feeble? Love the poor, I beseech you; stretch out your hand to them; have compassion on them, never repulse them or treat them harshly or contemptuously.

“ Again, whilst looking at those poor people waiting at the door, I said to myself: ‘ And I, should I not also be waiting at our good God’s door? Am I not as much in want of him as these unfortunates? Am I not his beggar? And should I not say to him, in the words of the royal Prophet, “ O God, my God, to thee do I wake at break of day!” ’ ”

On March 25, having assisted at Benediction in the new chapel at Rue François Ier, he went to Grenelle. At 9 o’clock he celebrated a Mass at which the *Dames Servantes* renewed their engagements of affiliation to the Little Sisters. He seemed radiant during Mass—his countenance lit up with a supernatural brightness. He spoke afterwards to the Associates, with a specially touching unction, on their beautiful name of Servants of the Poor, which would be their title to glory in paradise. “ There is not one amongst us,” said a *Dame Servante*, “ who will not preserve the recollection of this, our last and solemn meeting, where he spoke to us all gathered together with a radiant face and burning words of our mission, and his desire to see us approach ever nearer and nearer to our Lord and to imitate him on all points. How persuasively he urged that on the

day of judgement the little sacrifices we have made for the poor, and the services we have rendered them, will earn our greatest merit in the sight of God. And the title of humble Servants of the Poor will be our most powerful recommendation and the best offering we can make to God, and what he will receive the most graciously, since in serving them we are serving the Divine Master. It might be said of that discourse that it was a last farewell, a will or testament which he bequeathed to us, and which he strove to impress on our hearts."

We may, indeed, say that all the words he spoke in these last days bore that character.

On Palm Sunday, March 26, before going to a meeting of the Fraternity he spoke a few words to his daughters. They were the last that he addressed to the community.

"My very dear daughters, we are now beginning Holy Week, the great week. You have been singing a little while ago '*Pueri Hebreorum*': 'the multitude of the Jews cut boughs, and strewed them on the way, and cried Hosanna to the Son of David.' You also, taking olive branches in your hands, you have gone to meet Jesus. My children, you know you can only triumph in peace, and I may add in charity, which is the oil extracted from the olive. Therefore our Lord when taking leave of his apostles said to them: 'I give you my peace.' I have washed you in my blood, I have reconciled you with my Father, after having reconciled you with your brethren; abide in my love in that peace full of charity which I bequeath to you. You will have to fight, for you have not reached the end.

"I say the same thing to you, my very dear children. *To acquire the right to the palm, keep the olive branch.*

Let us start—you and I—from this moment loving our Lord alone, and we shall prove it in loving our eternal Father and our brethren as he loved his heavenly Father and mankind, who were his brethren.

“A love without measure for God, let that be to-day’s fruit, and an ever-increasing love for our neighbour—for those who have a right to our devoted service, so that they also may one day bear the palm of victory. Then, when the moment has arrived, we shall go to meet Jesus coming to welcome us; and, the branch of olive in the left hand and the palm in our right, we shall enter the heavenly Jerusalem, singing: ‘Hosanna in the highest: to the Son of God who has given us peace and triumphed in us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Alleluia.’”

During the Mass of the Fraternity, he was seen, according to his habit, going in and out of the ranks of his dear working men, showing them when to sit down and when to stand at the right time, and encouraging them to sing the *Credo*, and joining in it himself with his whole soul.

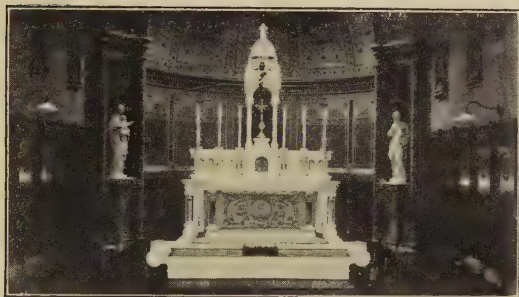
Those who on that day (we read in the *Bulletin de la Fraternité*) pressed round the Father—the smile on whose lips disguised the suffering which was already undermining his worn and exhausted powers—little thought as they listened to his wise counsels, which were ever so practical and so supernatural, that he was taking his last farewell of them. His death, though it came unexpectedly, did not take him by surprise. The Father had been preparing for it for long years, with an austere and courageous simplicity.

But to go further into details about this, the last week of Père Pernet’s life, and to give its history, we should

do well to quote the admirable words spoken by Père Marie Jules, religious of the Assumption, in addressing the Meeting of the *Dames Servantes* a few days after the death of their venerated founder.

“Tertullian,” he said, “speaks of the Christian as ‘another Christ,’ and this, in truth, is what should be the object of all: to reproduce Christ. But if this is true of every Christian, how much more true is it in the case of a priest! Père Pernet, like his Master and Model, underwent his passion in the last days of his life. Those words in the Gospel which were said of our Lord on the eve of his death might have been applied to him from Wednesday in Holy Week: ‘Knowing that he was about to pass from the world to his Father, having loved his own, he loved them to the end.’ Charity was the Father’s leading characteristic. From that time I noticed that his countenance, ordinarily so bright, was clouded over; he was suffering from a kind of mental agony. . . . The preceding night had been a bad one—so he told Père Bailly—in spite of which he was the first in the church at three in the morning. All his thoughts were bent on the ‘Pasch’ on Maundy Thursday; was not that also the case with our Lord? Though the disciple was far below the Master, it pleases me to draw this parallel between them. ‘With desire,’ our Lord said to his apostles, ‘I have desired to eat this pasch with you’; and the Father had said: ‘How much I wish to give you once more the paschal Communion.’ He had that consolation. He sang High Mass, and celebrated the holy Sacrifice, for the last time on Maundy Thursday. Then came Good Friday; his passion was not begun, but he had a presentiment of it. He spent a long time praying alone in the lower chapel;

CONVENTS OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF
THE ASSUMPTION.



THE CHAPEL, DUBLIN.



THE CHAPEL, DUNLEARY.



CORK.

our Lord prayed alone in the garden of Gethsemani. . . . On Holy Saturday when the Passion of the Master was over the passion of the servant began. It did not last long; like Jesus Christ he had his moments of distress and suffering, for the pains were incessant. The dreaded hour had come. From that time the Father forgot everything earthly, and, during the two days which remained, he was alone before his God; he saw nothing but his crucifix and his soul. This is the way of the saints. The world which surrounds them disappears. All they are conscious of is God, and their nothingness. It was thus with the Father. He forgot his work as founder in order to think only of Jesus Christ, and to shut himself up in his stronghold of humility. He spoke of himself as a sinner, a miserable man. . . . Only in order to bless his family, his posterity, did he interrupt, momentarily, his contemplation."

Let us not, however, anticipate; let us follow step by step the last few hours he spent on earth. For several days Père Pernet had felt warnings of the complaint which was to be the cause of his death, but he struggled against them, being unwilling to make changes in his way of life. When he arrived at Grenelle on Holy Saturday, his appearance betrayed him, and, on being questioned, he was obliged to own that he was not feeling well. "I have a pain in my head," he said, "but it will be nothing." An attempt was made to find out more, and he admitted that he had had a bad night. But he managed to evade further questions, saying, as he had done before: "Do you think this is the first time I have had a pain? One must make an effort." Accordingly he assisted in the sanctuary at the long office of Holy Saturday. At ten o'clock, in spite of all the

efforts that were made to dissuade him, he insisted on blessing the whole of the mother-house of the Little Sisters, which he was accustomed to do yearly on the eve of Easter Sunday. The effort he made to do so must have been very great, but in answer to all remonstrances he said it was only his laziness, and that he could not leave all the work to others. Would it not appear rather that God should have permitted him to go over the whole house once more, and give his blessing to the place which was so dear to him, and in which he had given so much edification? . . . At 11 o'clock he would only take a little soup for his midday repast, and in spite of his fatigue, he proceeded to dictate some letters, and went to visit a sick novice. He did all these things in haste, as if he feared not to be able to finish what he still had to accomplish. He should have started at 3 o'clock for the Rue François 1^{er} to hear confessions; but, feeling that he was getting worse, when the hour approached he asked for a conveyance to take him back to his community. He was longing to get back to his convent, but Providence willed that his daughters should receive the supreme consolation of having him in their midst in the last hours of his pilgrimage.

He still had to go to the confessional where he was awaited. When he left it he was suffering severely from an acute pain in his right side. The Sisters meanwhile were in the chapel singing Compline for Easter-eve. The Superior-General was officiating, and no one had any suspicion of the catastrophe which was impending. The Father asked for the Infirmarian. "Give me a blister," he said, "and don't trouble your Mother. But get a carriage as quickly as you can."

When Compline was over the Mother was told what

had happened, and she found him, with features distorted by pain, choking and groaning under the violence of the attack. She put before him so strongly the danger to which he would be exposed of certain death on his way back that he allowed himself to be persuaded to betake himself to the chaplain's house at the end of the garden, which he reached with great difficulty. The carriage having arrived, a messenger was sent to fetch Dr. Ménard and to give notice of the Father's illness at the Rue François I^{er}.

The soldier fell on the battle-field; the Father amidst the family whom God had given him; the founder in the centre of his work. If, however, the founder, Father, and soldier had been consulted, he would once more have answered: "I am a priest and a religious; I would far rather die in my cell with no other joys than those of renunciation, humility, and self-sacrifice." But it was precisely on account of those virtues which he had practised so admirably all his life that God had destined him these consolations. He, who had ever forgotten himself in the service of others, whose humility had caused him to seek to be unknown, was about to receive the highest recognition of his virtues and merits. . . . He who had given the Little Sister to the sick, the poor, the forsaken in order to soften their trials and watch by their bedside, was himself to experience their ministrations when dying; he, the religious, vowed to holy poverty, was to be nursed by a Little Sister, the servant of the poor. Notwithstanding their sorrow, the daughters of Père Pernet could not help praising God and blessing his designs in these occurrences.

Dr. Ménard and the doctor of the district arrived at the same moment and the sick man as soon as he saw

them said: "I place myself in your hands, do what you like with me, but contrive, as much as you can, for me to give as little trouble as possible to others."

In the middle of his acute sufferings, he preserved his cheerfulness and seemed to try and dissipate the great and increasing anxiety felt by those around him. But after making a playful remark in answer to a surmise on the nature of his malady, he added: "My God, may thy will be done."

The doctors applied blisters and other severe remedies. Meanwhile Père Vincent de Paul Bailly, Superior of the Convent of the Rue François I^{er}, arrived, and the Father, forgetful of his sufferings, enquired eagerly after the healths of Père Picard and Père Hippolyte, who were also laid up. Père Bailly reassured him on that subject, and told him how rejoiced they all were that he was being nursed by his daughters. The invalid went to confession, and then, as his sufferings showed no signs of diminishing, he begged earnestly to be anointed. In answer to the promise which was made that he should be warned if he became worse, he said: "I implore you not to refuse me the grace of the Sacraments." The Father never ceased making ejaculatory prayers. "*Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*" "Lord Jesus, my loving Master, may we be like thee in thy Father's hands," were words constantly on his lips. And when the pains became more acute, "God is great. God is good, he is loving. *Gloria Patri, et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.* Jesus my Saviour. Jesus, Mary, Joseph."

Turning to the Mother-General and to the Sister-Infirmarian, he said: "My children, love our Lord. Love him alone. May he be wholly yours and you wholly his. May all you do be done for him alone. May

he reign in you." And then in the midst of the groans, which the acute agony of his pain drew from him, he accused himself of cowardice and effeminacy. During the time that the Father was enduring these tortures, the Fathers, who were hearing confessions in the chapel of the Little Sisters, had the consolation of receiving twenty strayed sheep who had found their way back in the fold.

Dr. Ménard, on returning the same evening, diagnosed the Father's malady as congestion of the lungs. He applied leeches, and would have spent the night with the invalid, but that Père Paul François, a religious of the Order of the Assumption, insisted on taking his place. When the doctor returned at 4 a.m., the disease had made great progress, both lungs were affected, double pneumonia had set in, accompanied by a very high temperature. At 5.30 he received Viaticum from the hands of Père Paul François. During the morning, regardless of his sufferings, he manifested the greatest interest in all that was going on in the chapel, where the Feast of Easter was being solemnised, that day being one very dear to him. The Fathers came, one after another, to visit him, rejoicing at getting his blessing and a few words with him. He was told that everyone was praying for him and asking for his recovery. His answer was: "They would do better to pray for pardon for my many and grave faults."

Telegrams were sent to Père Emmanuel Bailly in Rome, and to all the houses of the Little Sisters, to announce his illness. H.E. Cardinal Richard, when told of it, promised to visit him on the following day. Père Picard, who was ill and had not left his room for some days, when he heard of the serious nature of the

Father's malady, in spite of the risk, started off for Grenelle to see him. He stayed a long time with Père Pernet. "Your daughters," he told him, "are praying for your recovery, which I am well aware you are not asking for. You are longing for heaven, so as to see God. But let us pray that his will may be done." "Pray," the holy sick man said, "that our good God may give me patience. I wish to suffer as I have greatly sinned."

Before taking his departure, Père Picard promised him, in answer to his oft repeated desire, that he should receive Extreme Unction the following morning, a promise which filled him with joy. Whilst the complaint he was suffering from continued unabated, the Father tried to cheer up those who surrounded him. He encouraged the Mother-General when she came to see him, saying: "Be brave, my daughter, our Lord loves you, he will be with you."

When he was given a refreshing drink, he said: "Oh, how our Lord must have suffered on the Cross! The good Master had not even one little drop of water. I am taken too much care of."

"My dear Father," the Mother-General answered, trying to smile, "we have every reason to take care of you; you are poor and therefore altogether at our mercy."

A telegram from Cardinal Langénieux, Archbishop of Rheims, sending him his blessing and assurance of his prayers, pleased him very much. He had now become so weak that he found it impossible to raise himself on his pillow when he wished to do so. The Sister who had the care of nursing him came to his assistance, and then the venerable founder of the Little Sisters—the

nurses of the poor—was heard to say: “What would become of one if one was alone! . . . I am helpless.” When recourse was had to oxygen to facilitate his breathing, remembering the religious poverty to which he was vowed, he begged them to desist, in spite of the relief it gave him, saying it was too expensive, and was not a remedy for a poor man.

At 9.30 p.m. a telegram was brought to him from Father Bailly conveying the Pope’s blessing, and telling him that the students in Rome had been making a pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles for his intention. The Father was deeply moved by this communication, and blessed and embraced the two Fathers who brought it, saying: “You could not have brought me a more precious gift. I beg of our Lord to ratify his Vicar’s blessing.” A few moments afterwards, when the Mother-General and the nuns came to ask for his blessing before retiring to rest, he said: “I will give you a reflection of the Pope’s blessing.”

The Father’s night was a painful and sleepless one; he never ceased praying, his crucifix in his hands, and pressing it against his heart. Every word he uttered breathed the most complete abandonment to the will of God and a profound and touching humility. If the words “How weary I am” escaped his lips, he struck his breast to make, as it were, reparation for them. The words “Our good God is Master, let us belong to him. My God, how great thou art. My God, forgive me my sins” were constantly on his lips. Having asked for his rosary, he recited the whole of it, and, in spite of his extreme weakness, held it up so as to let the beads slip through his trembling fingers.

He was much pleased when Lourdes water was mixed

with what he was given to drink. "That is right," he said, "give me water from the fountain of the *bonne Mère*; you give me so little. Don't be stingy with it." . . .

At 8.30 a.m. on Easter Monday, Père Picard came to give him the Last Sacraments, at which twelve of the religious were present. Père Bailly brought the Blessed Sacrament. As soon as they had entered his room, the Father said aloud: "I ask pardon of the community for the bad example I have given them." He followed all the prayers when receiving Extreme Unction with close attention, and in spite of the pains, which drew groans from him at times, answered the Amens with great faith and devotion.

Père Picard addressed him in a few touching words before giving him Holy Communion:

"My very dear friend," he said, "our Lord is here. Jesus comes to you in his goodness and mercy; he comes to you as a Father to a son, and you will receive him as such. He has chosen you, he has helped you, and you have served him in your sacred ministry with love, fidelity, and generosity as a faithful son. All those who have loved you and have gone before you—your religious family, Père d'Alzon, your children—are praying for you. Your brothers surround you, your daughters are here; we are all with you. Place yourself, therefore, before the presence of the most Holy Virgin, whom you love, and renew your vows, according to the formula adopted by the Congregation since its commencement, and receive our Lord."

Père Pernet asked that the formula should be read slowly, and repeated it emphatically after Père Picard, even anticipating him in the words poverty, chastity,

and obedience, and accentuating the concluding words, "unto death." He then received Holy Communion.

The perfect obedience with which the Father submitted to the most insignificant orders of the doctors or infirmarians was a source of admiration to all. Père Picard, having been told that he had complained that he was too well taken care of, said: "He should obey, and take everything he is given." From that moment till the end Père Pernet accepted all that was offered him without a remark.

Notwithstanding the fever which consumed him, he never ceased praying, remaining closely united to God and never losing sight of his presence. He repeated incessantly the words "My good Master," and then he kissed the crucifix with loving fervour. The Sister-Infirmarian, fearing he was increasing the fever which was undermining his forces, said: "Father, the good Master asks you to make an offering of your sufferings in your heart and not to pray aloud as it increases your fever."

"My daughter," he answered, "I am quite ready to do so, but I cannot help praying."

At 5 p.m. on Easter Monday, the last day of the holy founder's life, Cardinal Richard came to visit him.

The Father summoned all his strength to the effort of expressing his gratitude, saying: "Thanks many times to your Eminence for coming to see me. What kindness! I am not worthy of such a favour. Give me your blessing," making an effort at the same time to raise himself to kiss the Cardinal's hand. He then asked him to bless the community—his children—before leaving. The venerable Cardinal answered, leaning over him: "*Sive vivimus, sive morimur, Domini sumus*"

(In life and in death we belong to Jesus Christ). After saying a few words about the joy he must be experiencing at the thought that he would soon go to our Lord, his Eminence knelt down and said: "Let us now, my dear Father, say a Pater and Ave together, with the intention of submitting to the will of our good God." The sick man, as much struck as edified at the sight of the Cardinal kneeling on the ground, joining his hands, united with him in prayer. The Cardinal then had a few minutes' private conversation with Père Pernet; after which he gave a kiss of peace to the holy founder, for whom for so many years he had never ceased giving proof of a sincere admiration and most paternal affection.

His Eminence was afterwards received by the Sisters in full community. It was with difficulty that they restrained their tears as he addressed them in the following words: "As soon as I heard that our good God was trying your Father by a severe illness, I hastened to come to him to give him my blessing. I have the highest esteem and affection for him. Our friendship is an old one, as it dates from the beginning of your Congregation, of which he was the founder. He has always edified me on all occasions when we have been brought into relations, and he has now again done so by his abandonment to God's will. I was thinking, when on my way here, how God has blessed your good Father. He has not deprived you of him till his work was done. For, since you have received the approval of the Holy See, your work has been established on a firm basis. I then, also, recalled to mind the words of St Francis de Sales to his dear daughters of the Visitation during the last days he spent on earth: 'You have no longer need of me. God has done me the favour of finishing your constitutions,

and everything is now established and in good order.' Well, my dear daughters, if the hour has come when our Lord intends your Father to go and enjoy an eternal rest with him in heaven, may his will be done. The saints are much more powerful in heaven than on earth. Your good Father will protect and bless you from paradise; he will be still more useful to you on high than he is here. Oh, how much he has loved our Lord! How hard he has worked in his service! I have asked him for a share in the merit of his sufferings and assured him of my prayers in his behalf. Well, my dear daughters, take courage. I am going now to pray for him and for you, and I will do so specially in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass."

Père Pernet said to the Mother-General the next time he saw her: "I am in our Lord's hands, and so are you, my children. Be always ready to conform to his holy wishes. May we be always resigned to his will. Charity. Charity. Faith, hope and charity."

The Mother answered: "Father, we will remember what you have so often recommended to us, unity of souls in the truth, and the unity of hearts in charity."

"Yes," he said, "that is the essential. Tell my children that I bless them all—*all*. I take refuge in the mercy of God."

Dr. Ménard paid a visit to the dying man (his fourth that day) at nightfall. His conclusion after an examination of his lungs was that the end was not far off, and he did not conceal his fears that he would not live through the night. At 10 p.m. the holy Father bade the Mother-General go and rest, and added: "I give you my blessing, and in you, to all our children."

This was his last blessing.

At 11.30 she was told that the Father's hands had become cold and moist; it was the end. He still preserved consciousness, and a mind absolutely at peace. He said to Père Marie Jules, who was watching by his bedside: "I wish to receive Holy Communion."

"But, Father," was the answer, "do you think you are able to consume the Sacred Host?"

"Certainly," he answered, in a firm voice.

Père Marie Jules set out in haste to cross the garden to fetch the Blessed Sacrament. But he had hardly left the room when a sudden change came over the Father's face. The Mother-General repeated some ejaculations, the *Salve Regina* was recited by all present, and at the words *Mater Misericordiae* the Father, without any convulsions or prolonged agony such as he had always dreaded, gently breathed his last sigh and gave up his soul to God.

Père Pernet was seventy-five years of age, and numbered fifty years of religious life. As has already been said, April 3, on which he died, was the anniversary of his ordination.

The holy founder's brethren in religion clothed him in his holy habit, and Père Picard, and all the Fathers and brethren in Paris, came to pray beside his remains. At two o'clock in the afternoon, his body was carried through the grounds of Grenelle to the large parlour next to the lower chapel, which was transformed into a mortuary chapel. The first absolutions were given, and the body was exposed there for two days before being placed in a coffin. The report of Père Pernet's death had no sooner spread than numbers arrived to look once more on his face, now so calm and peaceful, also to touch his body with crucifixes, rosaries, and linen

cloths. Whilst prayers were being constantly offered beside the dead body, tributes to Père Pernet's memory of a different kind were being held in the neighbouring halls and courts. Members of the divers confraternities arrived in crowds, many having interrupted their daily work in order to come, all proclaiming with one voice the virtues of the defunct; and speaking in praise of his humility, his simplicity, and above all of his charity.

At the same time letters and telegrams were being received at Grenelle from all parts of France and from abroad. Especial mention should be made of a letter from the Cardinal-Protector of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and of letters from their Eminences the Cardinals of Rheims, Lyons, and of Westminster; also from the Bishops of Montpellier, of Clermont, and of Nîmes, etc.: all giving testimony to their admiration of the eminent virtues of the venerated founder. Père Bailly telegraphed from Rome to Père Picard: "This sad trial will draw fresh graces. We pray with you; the loved and deeply venerated *ancien* will protect us. Cardinal-Protector feels it much. Friends in Rome mourn the man of God."

There was one favour to be asked for; a favour which in Paris is granted with difficulty. A place had been reserved in the vault where the Mother foundress was buried under the chapel in the Rue Violet, and no time was lost trying to obtain permission for the body of the holy founder to be laid there. The steps taken with this object succeeded with a facility which surpassed all expectation; the hand of God could be seen in this proceeding whereby a precious relic was presented to Père Pernet's religious family.

The remains were placed in the coffin on April 5, the

last service being rendered by Père Vincent de Paul Bailly, and some of the other religious, in the presence of the whole community of the Little Sisters. A hundred men belonging to the Fraternity, who happened providentially to be there for the opening of their Paschal retreat, assisted at the touching ceremony. A record on parchment of the dates of the life, death, and principal works of Père Pernet, some medals of Leo XIII, St Augustine, St Benedict, and our Lady of Lourdes were enclosed in a leaden case, and placed inside the coffin.

After the *De profundis* had been said, Père Vincent de Paul Bailly spoke a few words to those who were present:

“ This ceremony is an affirmation of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The early Christians lived in this hope, and it was on account of this belief that we read that they buried the bodies of the saints with such care, and directed that their own bodies should be laid beside them. By a striking grace and favour of God, this body—this relic—will repose here; we shall be separated by a stone only from this beloved Father. He will still live in our midst; his soul will keep guard over us, whilst we keep guard over his body.”

When the ceremony was over, Père Vincent de Paul invited the members of the Fraternity who were present to place the coffin on the catafalque in the chapel, where it was to remain two days, pending the funeral service. An instantaneous response was made to the appeal: all gladly desired to take a share in carrying the precious burden. The grief of these good men, who had been so dear to the Father, was so manifest and striking that an officer of the police, who was there on duty,

enquired who was the priest who had evoked such strong marks of affection. And having heard a brief funeral discourse spoken by one of the workmen, he was so profoundly moved by it that he asked one of the Sisters to give him some object which had touched "the saint." Accordingly he was presented with a crucifix.

The funeral took place on Saturday, April 8, in the presence of a great assemblage. The body was placed on a catafalque in the upper church of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and surrounded with candles. Père Picard, and the religious and the novitiate of Livry, were present; also the two Vicars-General, Pères Caron and Thomas, representing H.E. Cardinal Richard, and a great number of clergy. Père P. Bailly sang the Mass. The congregation, which was too large to find places in the upper chapel, overflowed into the one below, where two Masses were being celebrated. Above there was mourning, black vestments, and every sign of grief; below there was rejoicing, the Alleluias of the Resurrection, and the liturgical vestments of white and gold.

The absolutions were given by the Vicar-General Abbé Thomas.

This account of the Father's funeral would be incomplete if we omitted the following incident given by a *Dame Servante*: "The annals of the Congregation have doubtless recorded the Father's obsequies. But have they noted that after the Elevation, a little before the *Pater Noster* when recollection and absolute silence reigned, a sound was suddenly heard of a loud warbling of birds who came and fluttered against the windows of the choir, and then it suddenly ceased and was succeeded by dead silence. The effect produced was that of

a feeling of joy and victory, leading to confidence and hope, in contrast with the sadness which pervaded the minds of all at that solemn moment. Père Pernet had ever loved little birds—‘our good God’s little birds’ he called them—their liberty, their lively ways, their confidence in the morrow, all appealed to him. I cannot tell you how these sounds of bird-song and flight, which were audible to the whole assembly to the extent that one might have thought they were inside the chapel, struck me; they seemed to me to be a consoling incident, permitted by God, and of the nature of those one reads of in the Lives of the Saints.”

The last station in this way of the cross took place at 2 p.m. on the same day when the coffin was lowered into the vault prepared for it in the lower chapel; a copper plate affixed to it bore the following inscription:

CLAUDIUS STEPHANUS PERNET,
 AUGUSTIANORUM AB ASSUMPTIONE
 ASSISTENS GENERALIS
 FUNDATOR CONGREGATIONIS
 VULGO DICTAE
 PETITES SŒURS DE L’ASSOMPTION
 GARDES-MALADES DES PAUVRES A DOMICILE.
 NATUS DIE XXIII JULII. ANNO MDCCCXXIV.
 OBIIT DIE III APRILIS
 ANNIVERSARIA SACERDOTII EJUS. ANNO MDCCCCL.

The conclusion of the discourse preached after Père Pernet’s death by Père Marie Jules from which we have already quoted, and a few words spoken by the saintly Cardinal Richard, will fitly sum up this slight record of a holy life:

“All is great in the lives of saints, and all was great

in the life of Père Pernet. His last act was to ask for Holy Communion, and God had reserved something even better for his servant; it was no longer Jesus veiled in the Sacrament of his love that he was to see and receive, but Jesus unveiled in all the beauty of his sacred humanity. It was a death, too, without agony; a serene death in perfect consciousness. And he resembled his Master in his burial. He had his St John, his Joseph of Arimathea in the person of his religious brethren: the holy women, too, were there. The translation of his body, a true relic, was a pæan, a jubilation: first of all because it came in the midst of the Paschal feasts, and again because it was the time of nature's new birth; everything spoke of the Resurrection. . . . The Resurrection! We hailed it in the Alleluias sung in all the Masses; it was present in the thoughts of the vast assemblage of priests and laymen who assisted at his requiem. We noted it in the poor, the religious, the priests who had grown old on the field of battle, who bent the knee before this valiant soldier who had fallen on the ground which he had conquered.

"We may well apply the words of Holy Writ to him whom we have lost: *Laudemus viros gloriosos*. Yes, let us praise this man of God; his memory will ever be held in benediction. We may number him amongst our fathers in the faith, of whom we read that they were 'rich men in virtue, studying beautifulness . . . men of mercy, whose godly deeds have not failed.' What did Père Pernet seek in life but truth? And he loved it. Our Lord said: 'I seek not my glory but my Father's.' And it might have been said of Père Pernet that he aimed only at one thing, which was the glory

of God. . . . He is departed, and yet in a sense he is still in your midst. He says, 'It is for you to do what I have done.' 'I have finished my course, I have fought the good fight.' . . . In eternity he still remains your Father, and he presides over his great religious family from heaven as he did on earth."

The annual meeting at Easter of the Fraternity of our Lady of the Assumption took place on Low Sunday, April 9. H.E. Cardinal Richard, as usual, presided at it. Père Bailly addressed him in the following words on entering the community-room, on behalf of the Little Sisters:

"The arrival of your Eminence in the midst of the community of Little Sisters has ever evoked a deep sentiment of respect and love. The emotion on this occasion is redoubled as the Father is no longer here. But your Eminence comes to tell his daughters that they are not orphans."

"My very dear daughters," the Cardinal said, "I come to console you, and myself, for the death of your holy and venerated Father. Yes, it is a consolation and a joy, for in seeing the Fraternity of our Lady of the Assumption, I behold the result of your apostolate to the poor and the sick. This morning I reflected, when on my way here, upon all that our good God has done through Père Pernet. The care that our Lord takes to raise up religious institutions, suited to the wants of the times we live in, is one which fills me with admiration. Yours appears to me to be in the designs of Providence to procure the blessing of a Christian death for those who, frequently from ignorance, have lived in the complete absence of a Christian life. And at the same time you reform the family. Christian families owe

their source and are the outcome of your Fraternities of our Lady of the Assumption, and of the Daughters of St Monica. This is a great work.

“You have not counted fifty years’ existence, and yet how many graces has God seen fit to pour down upon you! For this object he has made use of the holy Père Pernet, and permitted that he should have accomplished his work up to the point that he could leave it, and go to his rest, without loss to it; for you received the consecration of your Institute in the Brief which I had the happiness of transmitting to your Father two years ago. There are founders who have not had the consolation of seeing their work established as yours was before their death.

“What you have now to do is to go on developing in the spirit which your Father endeavoured to instil into you—that is, in a close union with God, while exercising your work of charity.

“One thing has often struck me with regard to Père Pernet, which is that he was as desirous to preserve the interior life in you, as he was to inspire you with zeal, in order that the different exterior occupations which your mission necessitates should not come between your soul and God, or turn it away from him. He wished that your works should be performed under the leading of our Lord: that is, starting from your sanctification, so that you might pursue that end diligently whilst at the same time working for the sanctification of others. May our good God preserve this spirit in you.”

Cardinal Richard then proceeded to the lower chapel, where he gave Holy Communion to five hundred workmen. After Mass his Eminence received fifty more men as members of the Fraternity, and one decurion. In

the meeting which followed, M. Delepouve paid an eloquent tribute to the holy founder. The Cardinal also spoke of the deep affection and veneration he had for Père Pernet, and remarked that he had been present a few years before at the death-bed of Don Bosco, at Turin, in the same way as he had been at that of their holy founder, and that he looked upon it as a very special grace having witnessed the last moments of those two servants of God. He ended by saying: "I have long followed the career of Père Pernet and have admired how God had endowed him with all the gifts required to found this admirable work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The love of God and the love of our neighbour—that is all the law. It is impossible to love God without loving one's neighbour. Your Father, my very dear friends, loved God much, and likewise his neighbour; he has accomplished his work on earth, thus he rests in peace."

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION¹

THE Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption was founded in Paris, in 1865, by the Rev. Father Pernet, religious of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption, and Mother Marie de Jésus Fage. The process of their beatification has been commenced in Rome.

The Little Sisters devote themselves exclusively to the care of the sick poor in their own houses, and they

¹ This statement was drawn up for the International Conference at Strasbourg, 1928.



THE POSTULANTS'
HOUSE,
BLACKHEATH.

1. THE HOUSE.
2. THE WOODLANDS.

do so without remuneration. Their object is the regeneration in a Christian sense of the working man's family, and the re-establishment of Christian charity between the classes.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption have one privilege which is comparatively rare in the Church, of having a founder and foundress—a Father and Mother.

They owe precepts which make for formation of character and a fortitude based on monastic observances to their Father and founder; and they derive a wise and practical organisation from their Mother. Their day, under this double influence, has been portioned out into three periods each lasting eight hours:

Eight hours of Community exercises.

Eight hours of works of charity.

Eight hours of repose.

The aim of the Little Sister is not to nurse, tend and cure the sick persons: she looks upon it as a means; her end is the coming of the kingdom of God in the soul and in the family of the poor and the workman. Her motto is that of the Order of the Assumption: *Adveniat regnum tuum.*

The Rev. Father Emmanuel Bailly, in his Life of Mother Marie de Jésus, says of the Little Sister: "She is a nurse and an apostle. She calls her life's work a mission; she is an apostle, a missionary, a catechist more than a sick nurse. For a record to be satisfactory in her sight, it should register four thousand souls who have been converted to God for a thousand whose bodies she has nursed. Her work is essentially supernatural and apostolic. Her main solicitude is to re-establish faith, prayer, and a Christian life in the homes of the poor. Are we to draw the conclusion, conse-

quently, that she neglects the care of the body? Those who have come in contact with her could testify to the devoted service she renders to the sick and their families; the knowledge she displays in the healing arts; the care she gives to the children of her patients; her skill in cooking, and in the performance of the household duties which devolve on her. It is no timid, faint-hearted apostolate that the founders ask of their daughters. The Little Sister is told to arm herself for her campaign with a valiant spirit. Her post lies there in the battle of charity where reign the forces of hatred, ignorance, and misery. She imbibes this apostolic spirit—one of militant and intrepid faith—from an assiduous and daily study of the History of the Church. The love of the Pope and the Church with which Father d'Alzon inspired his sons has passed, like a family inheritance, into the soul of the Little Sister of the Assumption.

“The Little Sister goes to the people to devote herself to their service. She works efficaciously at solving the social question by untiring efforts at bringing about a reconciliation between the classes. She finds the means to effect this purpose in the Association of the *Dames Servantes des Pauvres*, which consists of ladies of the upper class whose services she enlists that they may help her with the resources at their command, and that they may give their personal assistance, with her, in their care of the poor. Another means she makes use of is to invoke the services of men belonging to the leisured and professional class of society (to whom her founder gave the name of decurions) in order that they may befriend the Fraternity, which is comprised of converts who are fruits of the Little Sisters' labours among the working class. Again, she groups the converted wives

and mothers of the same class under the name and confraternity of the Daughters of St Monica.

“These latter associations, which are exclusively pious in their methods and their end, are well adapted to the object of insuring the perseverance of the converted men and women, and fortifying them in the practice of virtue and of their holy religion.”

Venerable Don Bosco, having become acquainted with the Little Sisters of the Assumption, said of them: “Yes, this is God’s work. It will do great good in the Church.”

The saintly Cardinal Richard states: “What I find specially to admire [in the Little Sisters] is the manner in which Father Pernet has succeeded in combining their religious life and their life of prayer in such a high degree, and in such a far-reaching manner, with their active apostolic life. I have never seen this carried to such lengths in any Institute of this description, and I look upon it as a great power for good and a great guarantee.”

Cardinal Vannutelli, the Cardinal-Protector of the Little Sisters, says: “I know few institutions so well adapted to the wants of the present time as that of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. A work such as theirs is secure of God’s protection, as is demonstrated by the prodigies accomplished by them among the working classes in all the countries in which they exercise their charity.”

Cardinal Vaughan would have readily welcomed twenty centres of action of the Little Sisters in London. “The Little Sisters,” he said, “seek to lead the people to a new light, to a consoling hope, to a future which is both surer and better. To sum up: It is a whole course of

moral teaching, a revelation on the Christian ideals which is never put before the poor in their own homes and with which they ought to become acquainted. This is the object of the Little Sisters, such are their hopes; though in their life of charity they make no parade of their lofty aspirations. . . . They appear to have found the secret of success; their life of prayer, of self-abnegation and of gentle charity makes their influence over the lower classes irresistible."

Cardinal Bourne also desires their presence in the great industrial centres, "in order that in time family life, even amongst the indifferent, should be transformed and supernaturalised."

Pius X, when receiving the Mother-General in an audience on December 18, 1903, said to her: "I bless all your works which have for their object the regeneration of the working man's family. . . . Teach love of labour to the working man of which you give him the example; teach them order, economy, and in doing so you will lead to their happiness."

The mother-house of the Little Sisters of the Assumption is at 57, Rue Violet, Paris, XV^e Arr. They go forth every morning from the dozen houses, situated in the capital and the suburbs, on the conquest of souls, and have no fear of confronting what Cardinal Dubois calls "the red belt," where ignorance of all religion prevails and is a greater misery than any other.

They have twenty-one houses in the following towns in France:

Lille (two houses).

Amiens.

Troyes.

Clermont.

St Étienne (two houses).

Montpellier.

Nevers.	Toulouse.
Lyons (three houses).	Dunkerque.
Nîmes.	Reims.
Perpignan.	Bourges.
Creil.	Roanne.
Tourcoing.	Le Teil.
Brest.	Cette.

Marseilles (two houses).

They have spread to England, where whole families have embraced the Faith.

London (three houses).	Chester.
Birmingham.	Norwich.

In Ireland they have three houses:

Dublin.	Cork.
Dunleary.	

In Italy they have three houses:

Rome.	Milan.
Turin.	

One in Spain:

Barcelona.

Four in Belgium:

Brussels.	Marchienne.
Antwerp.	La Louvière.

In North America three houses:

New York (two houses).	Philadelphia.
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South America four houses:

Argentine.	Buenos Aires.
Uruguay.	Montevideo.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption's greatest wish is to extend their missionary work, not in civilised

countries only, but in those lands where the Faith has not yet been preached, in order to carry out the wishes of their founders, whose word to them was: "Do not forget you are apostles, missionaries; proclaim this in a loud voice so that all should hear."

The result of their work in the last ten years is as follows:

Sick people nursed	..	..	..	105,231
Conversions	..	..	..	67,875
Easter Communions	..	..	..	261,029
Abjurations	..	..	..	2,153
Children baptised	..	..	..	11,664
Adults baptised	..	..	..	4,580
First Communions	..	..	..	15,782
Confirmations	..	..	..	12,782
Regularisation of Marriages	..	..	..	15,868
Births of legitimate infants	..	..	..	9,124

Four hundred thousand, seven hundred and ninety-seven spiritual graces have accordingly resulted from the care the Little Sisters have given to the corporal wants of a hundred and five thousand, two hundred and thirty sick people—which gives four spiritual works for every corporal work of mercy.

The Little Sisters rejoice at seeing our good God's blessing on their labours, but their zeal for his glory is not yet satisfied.

His Holiness Pope Pius XI in an audience he gave to the Mother-General on March 12, 1925, said to her: "Statistics please me . . . not only in order to judge what has been done, but also to see what remains to be done, as that prospect affords no grounds for vanity or self-love. How little is all that we can do! The

ancient Romans said, '*Nil actum reputans si quid superesset agendum.*'"

Yes, indeed. Much remains to be done. How many unexplored plots are there in that vast field of the Father of the family, the universe! Then, what is that sinister red patch in the ripening harvest which is ever spreading more and more, stifling the good grain? As of yore, Christ's answer is, "The enemy hath done this."

In order to dispute the ground with the invasion of Communism and to defeat it, the Little Sisters would wish to be a legion in number; their cry re-echoes that of their venerated founder: "Multiply us, sanctify us, my God; and may thy kingdom come."

A rapid sketch of the proceedings of the Little Sister will show that her conquests are due more to her gentle influence and self-devotion than to her preachings.

This is the story of the man whose wife was nursed and converted by a Little Sister, and whose daughter made her First Communion at the age of thirty-nine. The Little Sister devotes herself assiduously to the sick woman, cooks the meals to suit the husband's tastes, puts order and a sense of comfort in the home. The workman when he comes back from his daily toil finds a catechism and the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith on the table. He takes them up, reads the Annals and exclaims: "Ah! those missionaries. What men they were!" He is even touched by their heroism. After some months the Little Sister ventures further and proposes that he should make his First Communion. "What!" he exclaims, much taken aback. "But," he adds, "I can't refuse you." And before very long he admits that he is glad he has consented. The instructions are got over without a hitch. The Little

Sister explains how the grace of the Holy Spirit breatheth where it listeth in a soul; and he answers: "Ah, but the Little Sisters prepare the way!"

He receives our Lord with perfect faith and perseveres in his new life—that of a fervent Christian—and replaces with his own hand at the head of his bed the crucifix which he had torn from it on the day of his marriage, thus making full reparation for the past.

Another instance we could give of a similar kind is the case of a young girl who was dying of tuberculosis, and whose parents swore they would not allow a priest to come near her. The Little Sister is called in, and alleviates to some extent her sufferings and prepares her to make her First Communion. The parents first resist and then, unable to withstand the touching scene, assist at it. Mariette rejoices upon being told that the bishop, who is making his visitation, is willing to confirm her. When the father is told that his lordship is coming, he can hardly believe his ears. "A bishop in my house!" he exclaims. Preconceived prejudice and hatred yield to surprise; a gentler feeling supervenes, he scrubs the floor himself and spends an unheard-of time in tying his cravat, and when his lordship appears shows himself the most respectful of hosts. What joy lights up the face of the dying girl as she receives the Sacrament of the perfect Christian! . . . As to the father and mother, they can think of nothing else but of the honour which has been done them, and they repeat: "A bishop in our house! who would have believed it!" And the neighbours repeat the news to each other: "A bishop has been in X's house, the rabid Communist. Who would have thought it possible!"

There are at present seven Convents of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in England, three in Ireland, and five in America, the addresses of which are as follows:

ENGLAND.

Four in London :

133, Lancaster Road, Notting Hill, W. 11.

14, Wellington Road, Bow, E. 3.

19, Cedars Road, Clapham, S.W. 4.

The Woodlands, 90, Mycenae Road, Blackheath, S.E. 3.

(Where English-speaking postulants are received.)

7, Chapel Field Road, Norwich.

30, Union Street, Chester.

15, Greenfield Crescent, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

IRELAND.

1, Upper Camden Street, Dublin.

35, York Road, Dunleary (co. Dublin).

Assumption Road, Cork.

AMERICA.

246E, 15th Street, New York.

340, Convent Avenue, New York.

1624, Poplar Street, Philadelphia.

1337, Calle Carlos Calvo, Buenos Aires (Argentine).

1518, Calle Durazno, Montevideo, Uruguay.



